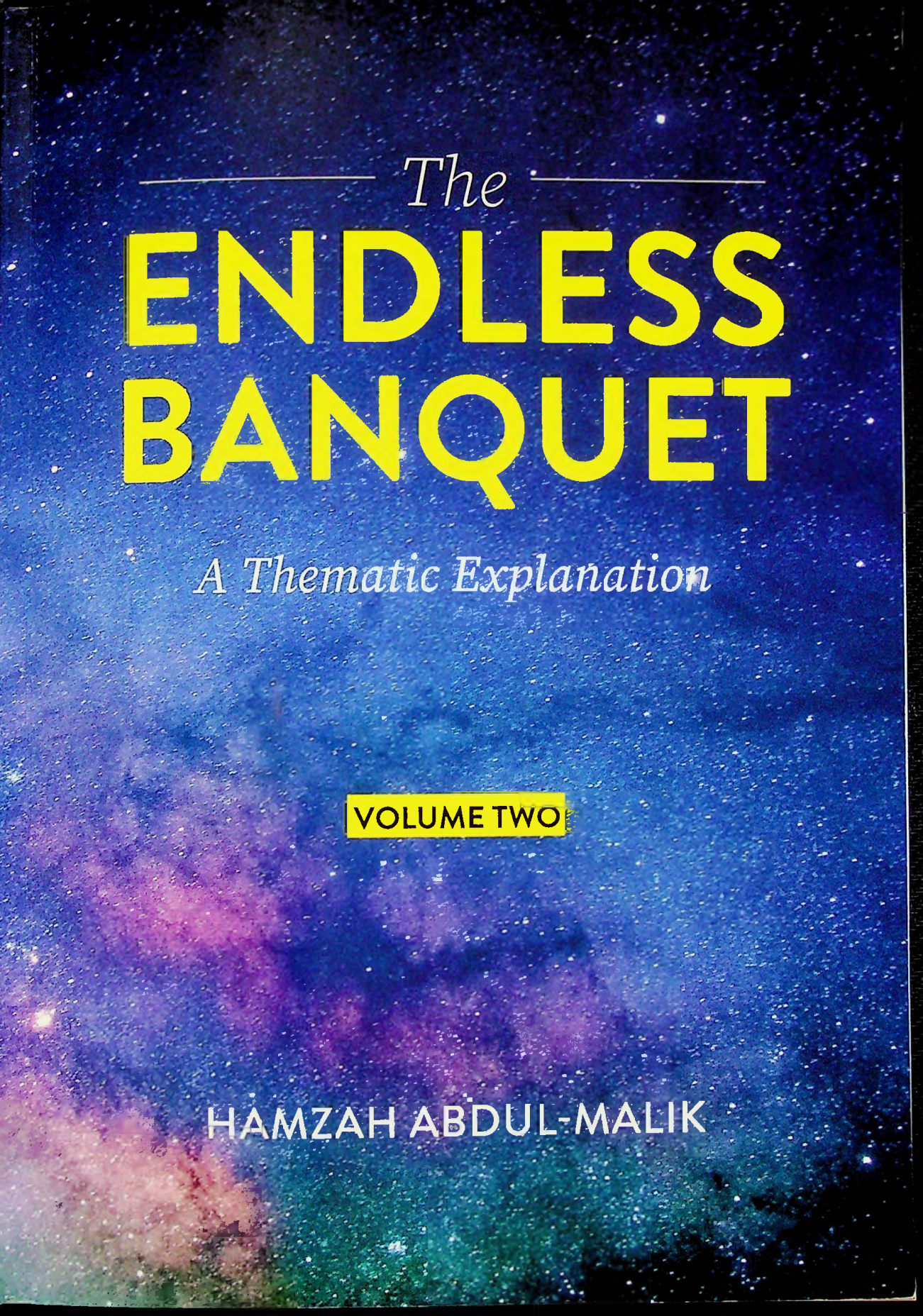
The
ENDLESS
BANQUET
A Thematic Explanation
VOLUME TWO
HAMZAH ABDUL-MALIK

The

ENDLESS BANQUET

A Thematic Explanation of the Qur'an

VOLUME TWO

By

HAMZAH ABDUL-MALIK

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All praise belongs to Allah who revealed the Qur'an, and made it a light that illuminates the hearts of every believing woman and man. And may He send the most sublime salutation of peace and blessings upon the most beloved of all creation, and upon his family and companions until the Day his intercession.

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

> We have made the Qur'an easy to understand, but is there anyone who would pay attention? [54:17]

I was 10 years old when I was first asked to read through the whole Qur'an in English. I had memorized almost half of the Qur'an by then, so I was excited to begin learning what it all meant. However, I distinctly remember opening up a Yusuf Ali translation and reading words like "thou", "thy", "similitude", and "hath not". As a child, I felt as if I needed to take a class in Shakespearian language before being able to know what the Qur'an means. I was able to finish reading the translation during Ramadan, but it was difficult.

As I grew older, I dedicated myself to learning Arabic. I finished memorizing the Qur'an, spent 15 years studying overseas, and eventually graduated from al-Azhar University. During that time, I began coming across translations that were easier to read. Yet, I still felt there was something lost: I couldn't see the connections between the āyāt and Surahs by reading the translations alone. At that time, if you asked me what the relationship was between Surah al-Baqarah and Surah Āl ʿImrān, I would have had no idea. I wouldn't have even been able to describe the connections between the beginning and end of any given Surah.

All this changed when I began studying two scholars: Habīb ʿUmar b. Hāfidh and Imam Muhammad Mutawallī al-Shaʿrāwi. I used to attend Habīb ʿUmar's public tafsīr lectures in the city square in Tarim, where he would weave the Qur'anic themes together and explain it as if Allah was speaking directly to us. Then I moved to Egypt and began - and ultimately completed - translating over 1,500 pages of Imam al-Shaʿrāwi's commentary of Surah *al-Mā'idah* and *al-Tawba*. This process opened my eyes to the wholistic messages of the Qur'an and the undercurrent of themes that connect the Qur'an to our everyday lives. I began thinking, "If people

who know Arabic have difficulty understanding these connections on their own, then it must be even harder for those who don't know Arabic." I began looking for a reading guide that could help the average person understand broader meanings of the Qur'an in the translation they were reading and develop a greater appreciation for what Allah was saying. And it is for that reason why I began writing this book, which was completed on the 27th of Ramadan 1441/2020.

The Endless Banquet is a three-volume reading guide of the Qur'an for people who want to have an intimate relationship with the Qur'an and read it as if Allah is speaking directly to them. It was written in easy language and focuses on explaining each Surah by grouping its āyāt together that share common themes. If you want to read the Qur'an and study its fundamental themes and connections without having to resort to sorting through thousands of pages of Arabic tafsīr, then this book is designed for you.

Throughout the series you will discover the benefits of why certain phrases are repeated, why the Qur'an repeats the same stories but with different details, the wisdom of how āyāt shift from speaking about law to stories, or from theological arguments to descriptions of heaven and hell. You can dis-cover connections between each Surah of the Qur'an and see the wisdom in their order and even learn how each Juz is divided upon overarching themes. The series will teach you the context for why certain āyāt are revealed and why they are still relevant today.

Ultimately, the goal of this work is to help people develop an appreciation for the Qur'an, especially the parts of the Qur'an that they don't usually read. By using this guide, they can begin developing a greater sense of wonder and awe that the Qur'an is supposed to inspire in the reader. Ideally, the reader will be inspired to ask new questions about the Qur'an and seek to find more connections that they were unaware of before and feel that they have a personal relationship with the Qur'an by being more familiar with it.

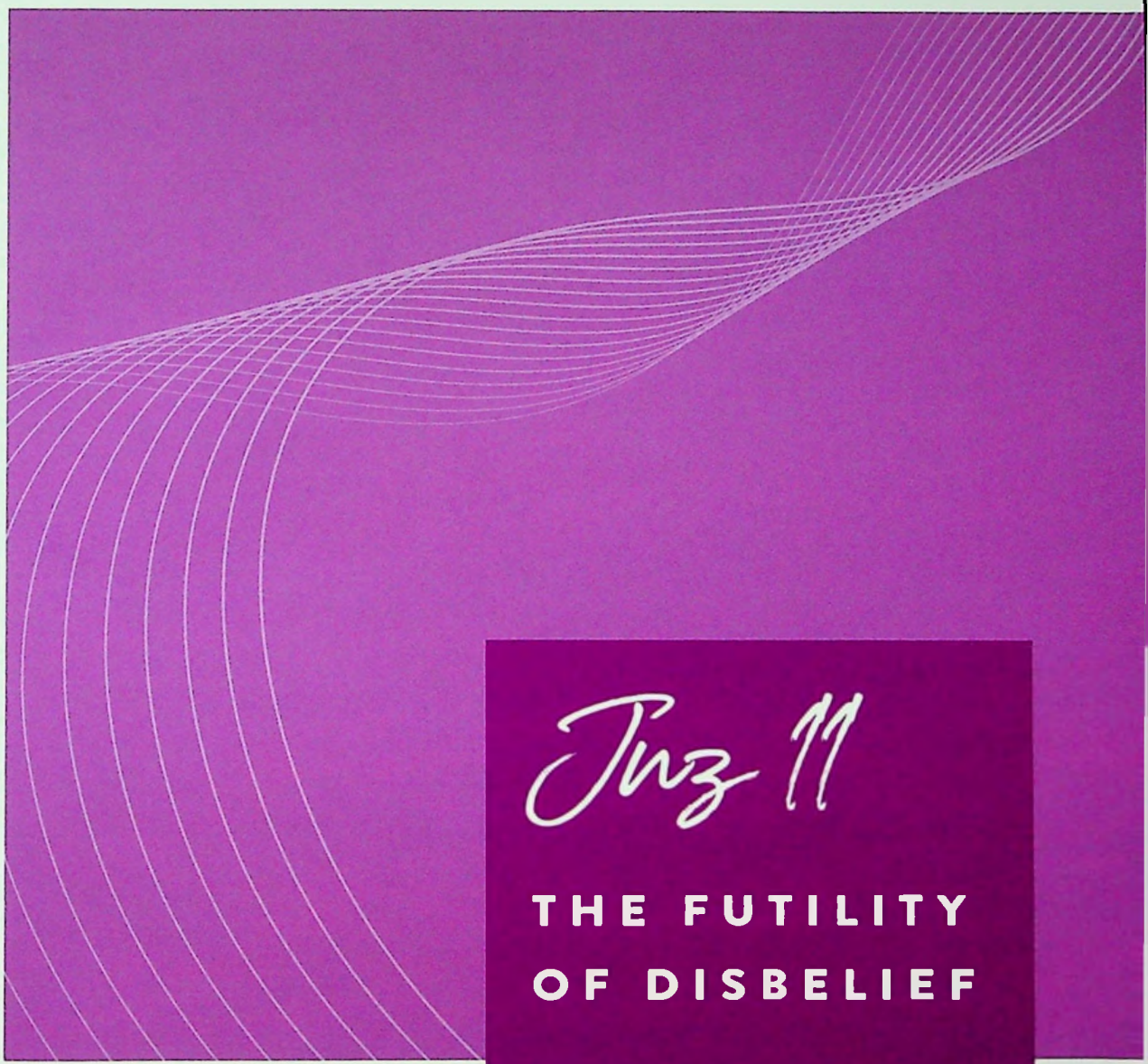
Each chapter of this book covers one Juz. While reading your Arabic Qur'an or your preferred translation, you should use The Endless Banquet as a guide to see the themes and connections for the āyāt that you are reading. One important point to keep in mind is that the Surahs of Qur'an are already divided into four major themes according to the Prophet ﷺ. He said, "I have been given the Seven Long Surahs in place of the Torah; I have been given the Hundreds in place of the *Zabūr;* and I have been given the Repeaters in place of the *Injīl;* and I have been given the

unique privilege of the Partitioned Surahs." [Reported by al-Imam Aḥmad in his Musnad]

The Seven Long Surahs approximately cover the first ten Juz. These surahs contain a heavy emphasis on laws and the stories of the Prophets and their people, with particular detail given to the Jews and the Christians (i.e. People of the Book). The Surahs termed "The Hundreds" cover the next ten Juz. They emphasize the signs of Allah's existence in nature and an abundance of rational proofs for Allah's attributes. The last ten Juz cover the Repeaters and the Partitioned. The Repeaters highlight the proofs of the Day of Resurrection and magnitude of Allah's Power and control over creation, while the Partitioned are the shorter Surahs revealed in Makkah partitioned by "Bismillāh Al-Raḥmān Al-Raḥīm". They specifically address the Prophet Muhammad while he was living through the hardships of spreading the Message in Makkah under severe persecution of the Quraish.

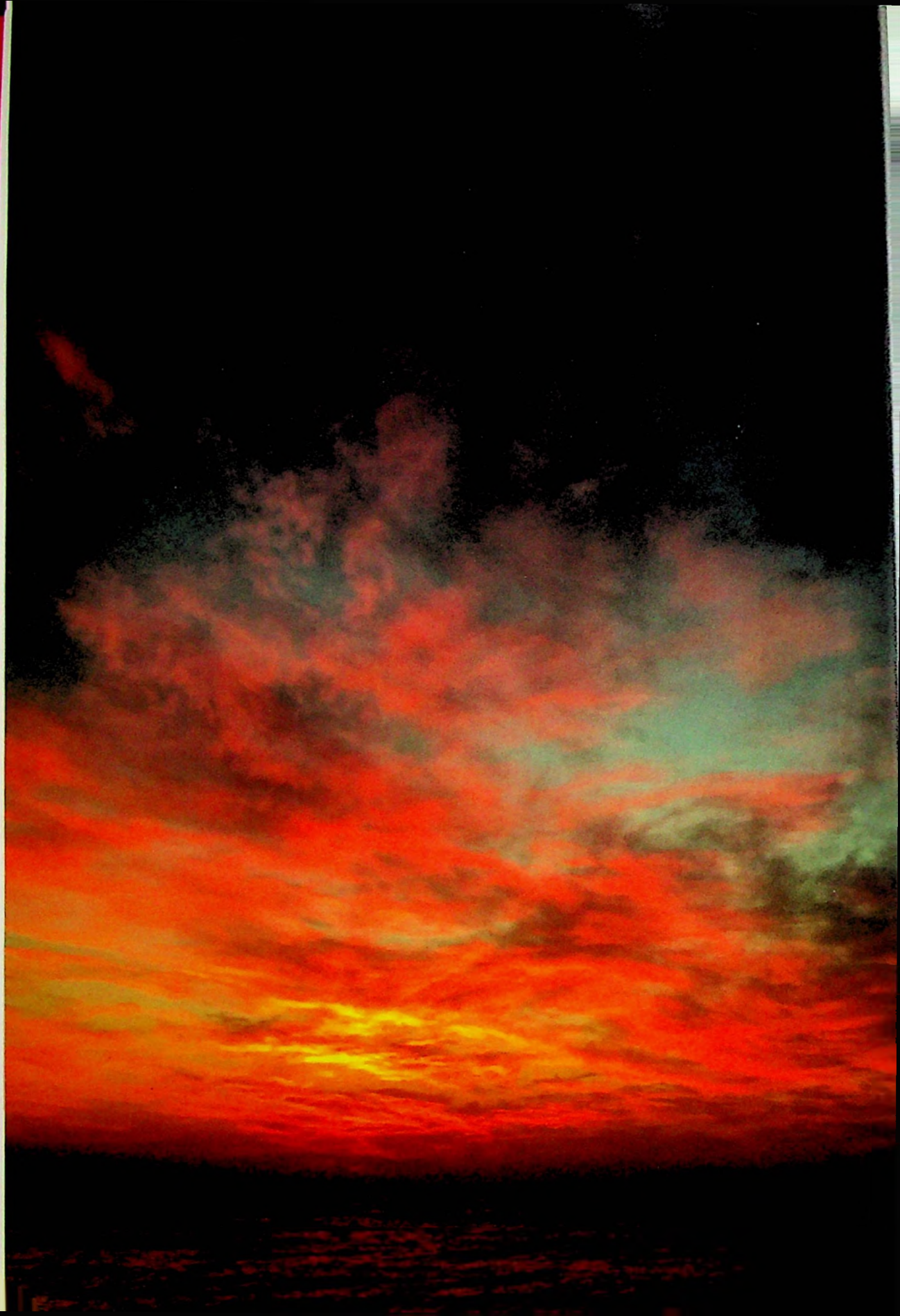
It is my hope that this book inspires a new generation of Qur'an readers, and that it rekindles a love for Qur'an inspired by its meanings, relevance, and connections that address the human condition. I pray that the Qur'an opens the hearts of all who read it, and that the The Endless Banquet becomes the key that helps unfasten the locks that have inhibited them from the impact of the Reminder. May Allah make us all among those who are guided by its words and realize the promise of its rewards.

> Surely this Qur'an guides to that which is most upright and gives good news to the believers who do good that they shall have a great reward. [17:9]



Juz 11

THE FUTILITY OF DISBELIEF



ĀYĀT
93-106

At the end of the tenth Juz, Allah presented us with two major factors that contribute to hypocrisy. One was avoiding battle, and the other concerned wealth and charity. Allah begins this Juz by continuing this theme, specifying the exact type of statements that the hypocrites use to justify their actions; statements which reveal the state of their hearts.

In terms of their speech, it includes overemphasizing their sincerity through excessive swearing upon Allah and their attempts to appease the Prophet and the public by appearing righteous. Allah responds to such statements by instructing the Prophet to ignore their words and to judge them by their deeds and spiritual reality. Thus, no amount of oaths or overtures will benefit them so long as their hearts are corrupted with ill-intentions.

Next, Allah exposes their relationship with wealth and charity. They view charity as a fine, not as an opportunity for gaining proximity to the mercy of Allah. Moreover, the more that they are required to give, the more animosity they develop in their hearts towards the believers, to the point that they look forward to afflictions that will destroy the believers and liberate the hypocrites from the pressure of giving. In the end, Allah will expose all of them to His Prophet, and their behaviours will be explicitly detailed in the Qur'an.

On the other hand, the believers are people who view charity as a form of purification of their souls from worldly attachments. Contrary to the hypocrites, they confess to their sins and seek the forgiveness of Allah because they are more concerned about their reputation with Allah than their worldly reputation.

ĀYĀT
107-116

Following from the previous *āyāt* where Allah detailed the words and feelings of the hypocrites, He now turns our attention to the types of institutions and organizations that the hypocrites create. In this section, we are taught the difference between a *masjid* that is constructed by hypocrites and a *masjid* constructed by the believers.

A *masjid* constructed by hypocrites has the following agendas:

- It facilitates harm.
- It divides the community.
- It spreads heretical beliefs and ideas.
- It is established on the shallow foundation of knowledge.
- It accommodates those who harbour enmity towards the Prophet.
- It sews seeds of doubt and anxiety in the congregations that attend them.

In contrast, the *masjids* that are established by the believers are places that are founded to promote *taqwā* of Allah, to seek His pleasure, to sacrifice for Allah and His Messenger, and to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong.

ĀYĀT
117-129

As usual, whenever Allah speaks about disbelief, sin, and hypocrisy, He follows it up with the subject of forgiveness and repentance.

First, Allah addresses the polytheists and teaches the Prophet that those who die as polytheists cannot be forgiven; even if such an individual is a family member like the family member of Prophet Ibrāhīm. This is because they decided to become enemies of Allah. On the other hand, those who are repentant and seek refuge with Him can always be forgiven no matter how bad their sins are.

Then there is a mention of those who could not fulfil their obligations due to unmanageable circumstances. It is those who will be shown mercy from Allah. Their reward will be the same as those who fulfilled the commands because Allah judges them based on the convictions of their hearts. Allah knows that, given the opportunity, they would have fulfilled His commands. This exemption also includes those who preoccupy themselves with seeking religious knowledge that will benefit the society. They are also given their due reward for fulfilling their role in the community.

As for the unrepentant hypocrites, Allah states that they will continue to mock the Prophet, avoid the recitation of the Qur'an, question its guidance, and fail to uphold every test that they are given from Allah without seeking forgiveness. The irony here is that they consider the religion to be a waste of time and see no benefit in following the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. However, in reality, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is actually a mercy for them and is only delivering that which is good for them. In the end, it is we who are in need of him, not the other way around.

SURAH YŪNUS

ĀYĀT
1-10

In Surah *al-Tawbah,* Allah comprehensively details the disbelief of the hypocrites and their doubts about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, leaving no doubt of the authenticity of his Prophethood. Now in Surah *Yūnus,* Allah shifts the subject to exposing the shallow nature of disbelief and the inevitability of the dire consequences if one fails to follow the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

In this section, Allah begins by demonstrating how complete His control is over all of His creation since its inception. He explains to us how He designed the universe in a harmonious fashion and set as-

tronomical cycles with mathematical precision. Yet, there are those who decide to disbelieve in Him and prefer this world over the next only to be punished. For the majority of the rest of this surah, Allah will address the futility of this disbelief.

ĀYĀT 11-25

Allah starts this section by showing us the nature of His punishment. As in most cases, when He holds it back, the disbelievers are emboldened to continue their oppression. Even when He places affliction upon them, we see that they persist in disbelief despite witnessing the power of Allah. Allah will show how this pattern manifests itself in the coming stories of previous disbelieving nations that rejected their Prophets.

Before relaying those stories, Allah first portrays the challenges that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself faces when it comes to proving the authenticity of the Qur'an. His detractors demand him to modify the Qur'an or create a new one. They insist he bring new signs while ignoring the many signs that were already given to them. Even when they know that Allah released them from an affliction, they develop schemes to justify their ongoing disbelief just like people who are shipwrecked in the ocean call to Allah to save them only to then turn their back on Him once they feel safe.

In the end, this cycle of disbelief is counterintuitive because nothing will save them from the destiny of death, and the only way to achieve true peace in the afterlife is by submitting to Allah.

ĀYĀT 26-41

Continuing on the subject of destiny after death, Allah explains how the people of spiritual excellence will be rewarded while those who disbelieve will find humiliation in the afterlife. All consequences will be based on what a person invested their efforts in during the life of this world. If they invested their actions in the

path defined by Allah, then they will reap the rewards from Him. If they placed their faith and actions in other than Him, they will lose in the afterlife.

Punishment for disbelief is justified because Allah proves why His lordship is indisputable. He is the One who initiated creation, sustains all life, provides all senses of perception, and governs life, death, and guidance. On what grounds could they deny the message and the Messenger if the One who has made all of creation is the same One who is sending this message?

The reality is that there are no grounds for them to deny this message, and they rely purely on assumptions and fabrications instead of the proof revealed directly from their Creator. To certify that they have no real evidence, Allah challenges the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He tells them to produce just one surah that can match the eloquence, depth, and truth of a surah from the Qur'an, if they really believe that this message was man-made. In the end, Allah makes it clear that there will always be those who believe and those who do not. Neither group will be held responsible for what the other group does, nor will they bear the burden, benefits, or consequences of each other's actions.

ĀYĀT
42-65

The consequences of choosing between belief and disbelief are more than just physical punishment and reward. There is also an associated internal and psychological consequence that will be discussed in this section.

To disbelieve, people have to shut off the natural faculties that were given to them by Allah. This means that they have to deny their own instincts, common sense, and what they see and hear in the natural world. They will have to ignore what their natural intuition tells them regarding the entire cycle of life and death.

Once Allah decrees death as the punishment, there is nothing that any person can do to reverse such a fate.

Allah shows that disbelievers would also have to deny the lessons of history. Every nation had a Warner sent to them, and no Messenger is able to change what Allah has decreed nor could they stop a Divine punishment once it was ordained, without the permission of Allah. Once Allah decrees death as the punishment, there is nothing that any person can do to reverse such a fate.

It is for this reason that humanity must adopt the guidance that is being given to them through the Qur'an. It is a cure, a mercy, and a guide for all the problems that humanity will face in this life and the next. Thus, rather than writing our own laws, arbitrarily dictating how wealth can be used, or fabricating revelation to fit our own ego, we should follow the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the revelation that was given to him by Allah.

Those who take this advice and believe in Allah know that He has absolute knowledge and control over all things, and therefore they will find solace in their trust in Him. Such people will not only receive good in this world from Allah, but they will also enjoy good in the next world.

ĀYĀT
66-74

In these *āyāt,* Allah explains the clear difference between who He is versus the others who are wrongfully worshipped besides Him. Leaving no room for assumption or interpretation, Allah explicitly rejects the worship of any idol or any human being who disbelievers claim to be His progeny. He owns everything and everyone, is not in need of anything and *cannot* need anything. Anyone who claims otherwise will ultimately fail in life; a matter that Allah proves through the history of the Prophets in this section.

The first mention is of Prophet Nūḥ and his people. Since Allah is clarifying the results of belief and disbelief, we find that He begins from a different point in the story than that relayed in Surah *al-*

Aʿrāf. In *al- Aʿrāf,* Allah introduces the story of Prophet Nūḥ at an earlier stage in his mission of *daʿwah.* Here, in Surah *Yūnus,* Allah focuses on the end of this mission. He begins the narration at the point where Prophet Nūḥ has exhausted the softer methods of debating his people and has resorted to challenging his opponents to do their worst and to suffer the consequences of their disbelief. Sure enough, they did that and were destroyed.

ĀYĀT
75-92

Allah gives us a second example of the triumph of belief over disbelief through the story of Prophet Mūsā and the Pharaoh. Here, we see how when truth is manifested, the disbelievers find various explanations to justify why they should not follow guidance. In this case, they called Prophets Mūsā and Hārūn sorcerers. Additionally, they claimed Prophet Mūsā sought power and challenged him to compete with their magicians. However, no matter what they did, each time they were proven wrong but still refused to believe. Thus, we reach a point where Allah shows us where both Prophets' attempts at guiding the Egyptians were exhausted, and the only sign left to prove the truth is their destruction. Once again, the believers succeeded and crossed the sea while the disbelievers were drowned.

What is unique in this story, however, is that Allah shows that even the Pharaoh acknowledged the truth in the end as death approached him. As proof of this entire story, Allah mentions that He will preserve the body of the Pharaoh. In this is a sign for all of humanity to witness the truth of the Qur'an and the ultimate failure of disbelief while the believing survivors (the Children of Israel) flourish until they transgress against themselves and abandon the truth.

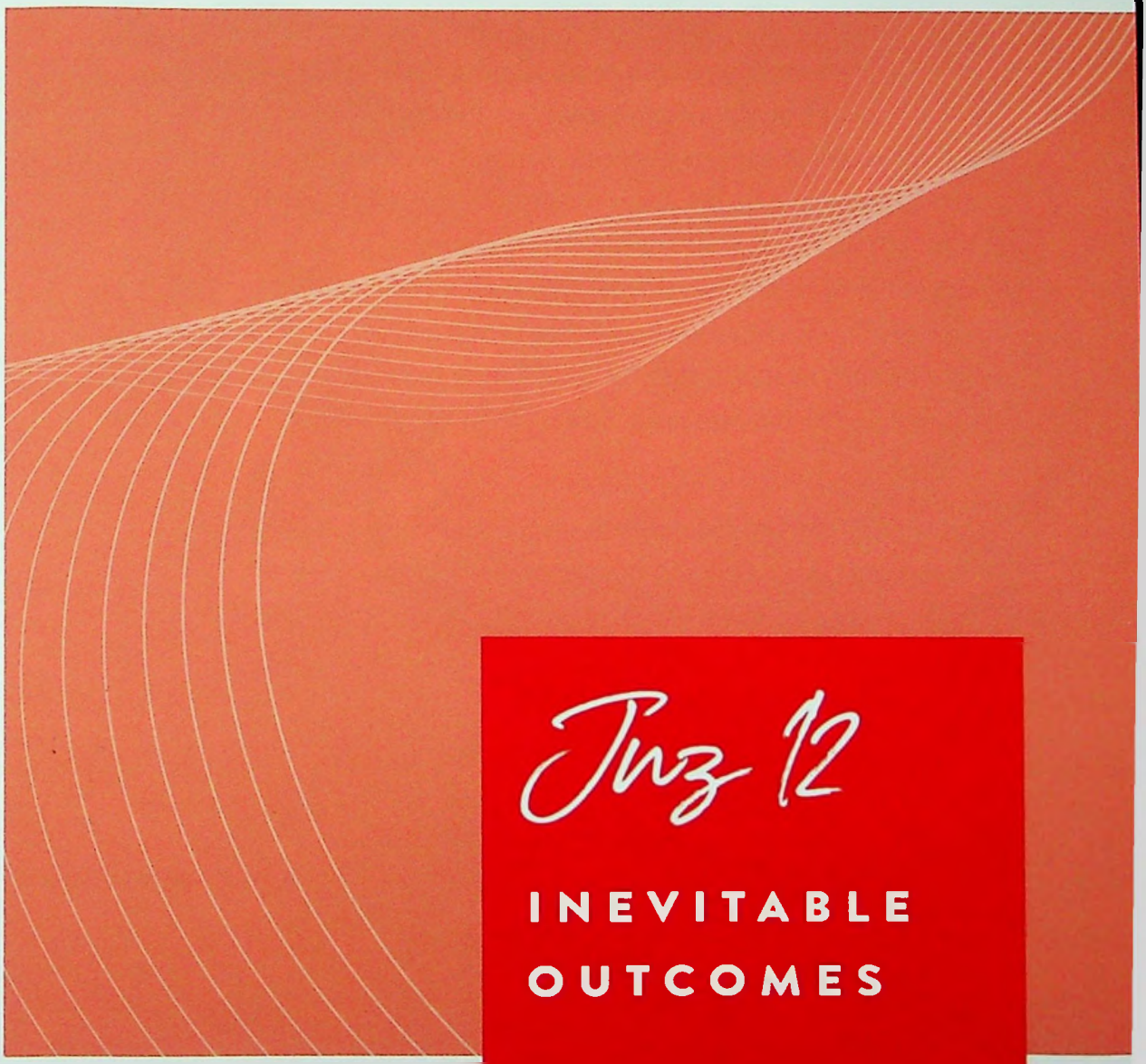
ĀYĀT
93-109

As the surah comes to a close, Allah addresses the Prophet by showing him that disbelief is inevitable. People cannot be forced to believe in him or his message since Allah created humanity with the ability to make a choice. Therefore, those who disbelieve will certainly meet their punishment, and those who choose to believe will reap the rewards. In the end, all will believe once faced with death. Unfortunately, that will be too late for the disbelievers just as it was for the Pharaoh.

The only disbelieving people of the past who changed their trajectory of punishment were the people of Yūnus. His people prevented their ruin by accepting guidance. This is why this surah is named after him. For the people who disbelieve in Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, there will always be hope that they repent and follow the model of the people of Yūnus. On the other hand, those who persist in their disbelief will meet the same consequences as their predecessors.

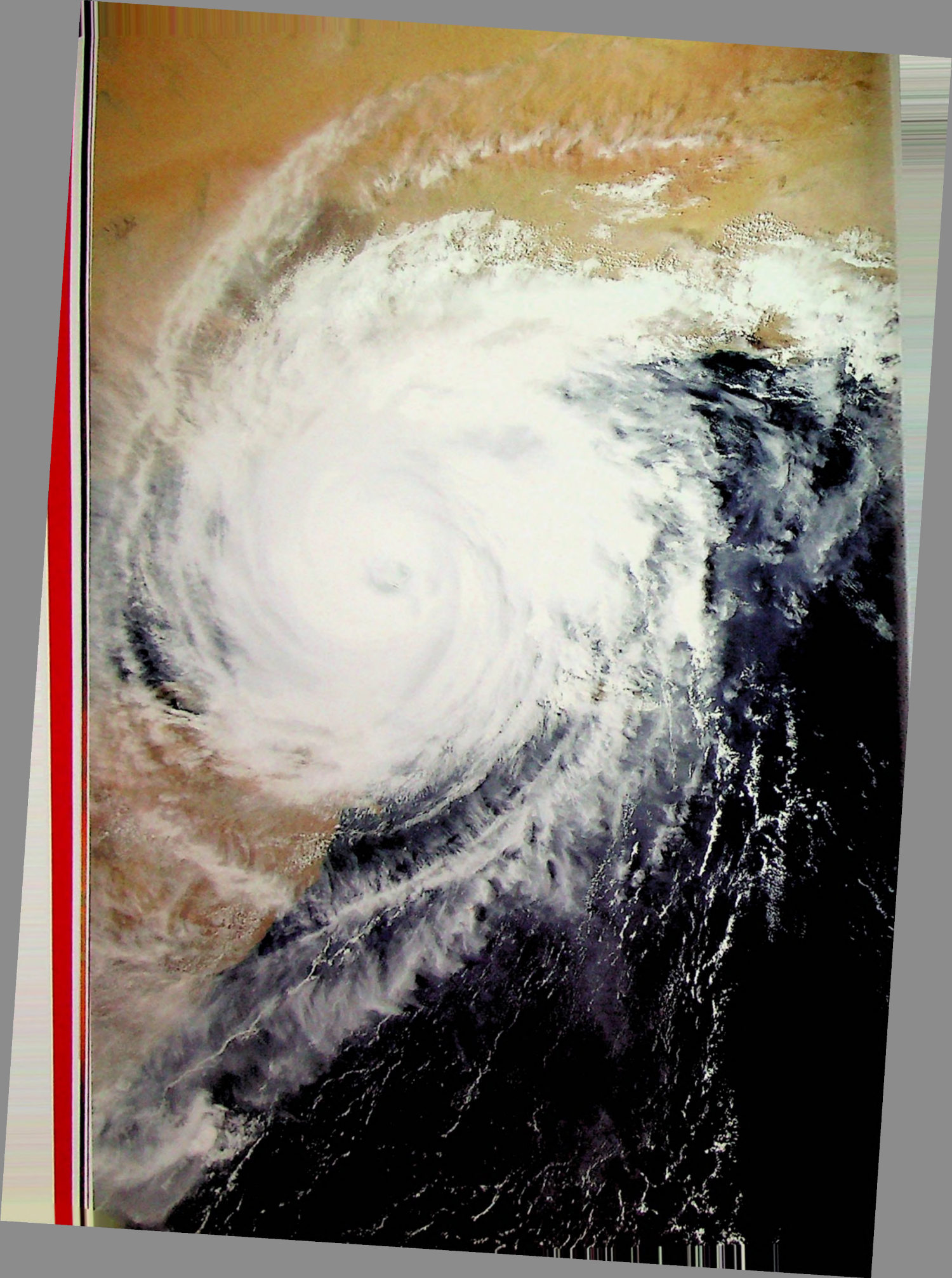
Therefore, Allah instructs Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to simply relay the message as clearly and plainly as he can, giving guidance to anyone who will listen. Moreover, He instructs the Prophet to make a logical case for people to worship the only One who can truly bring about benefit or harm. Anyone who follows the guidance will do it for their own benefit, and the Prophet will not be held responsible for anyone who rejects it. In the end, everyone will find Allah as the ultimate Judge, and He is the best of judges.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Juz 12

INEVITABLE OUTCOMES



SURAH HŪD

ĀYĀT
1-24

In Surah *Yūnus,* Allah gave us an in depth account of disbelief and how it conflicts with one's wellbeing in this life and the next. Moreover, He outlined how this will ultimately cause disbelievers to fail while the believers will always succeed. He also gave us details of the opponents of previous Prophets and how they lost everything. Then Allah directed us towards the story of Yūnus and his people through which we learn that salvation is possible if disbelievers repair their relationship with Allah. All these facts are mentioned as proof of the validity of the Qur'an's message and why it should be followed.

In Surah *Hūd,* we are again directed to examine the dialogues between the Prophets and their people but this time through a different lens. In this surah, there is greater emphasis on the specific events that take place when the disbelievers fall into ruin as well as the events leading up to it. Hence, Allah begins by demonstrating how detailed the Qur'an is and how its signs are laid out plainly. It shows who is worthy of being worshipped, who provides sustenance and has absolute control over everything, and who created the heavens and the earth. As we will see later in the surah, each Prophet will deliver similar proofs to his people.

The signs that were delivered are so clear that there is simply no logical reason for disbelievers to deny the truth of this message. Rather, they reject it out of pure arrogance. It is for this reason that it makes no difference if their punishment is postponed; it only em-

boldens them further. It is as if they have eyes and ears but refuse to use them for their purpose: to learn and accept the truth.

After Allah makes the inflexibility of disbelief apparent, He consoles the Prophet, telling him not to be apprehensive when speaking the truth in an attempt to appease disbelievers. Allah also informs him that he should not concern himself with delivering the miracles that the disbelievers demand. The miracle of the Qur'an is clear enough for them to believe. Those who believe in it will find their reward in the next life while those who disbelieve will find the punishment that Allah promises them, especially if they fabricate lies about Allah and what He says or expects.

ĀYĀT
25-49

Now Allah sets before us examples of how inflexible disbelievers are through the stories of past Prophets and their people; starting with the people of Nūḥ.

Here, we see how simple the message delivered by Prophet Nūḥ was; worship one Lord and leave the worship of man-made idols. Instead of looking at the merits of his message, his people attacked his integrity and that of his followers. They described them as ordinary and lowly, as if that was a valid reason to reject worshipping One Lord.

Seeing that they were clearly not using reason, Prophet Nūḥ meets them at the level of their argument. He points out that neither his human status nor the fact that his followers consisted of the poor were grounds for undermining the validity of the authority of Allah over them. The only true argument is that Allah is in control and that he – and they – should strive to be on the side that receives His mercy by submitting to Him.

In the end, his people decided to abandon all reason and dialogue and summon the punishment of Allah. Through this story we come

to learn of the first example of the futility of convincing people who refuse to believe in the Prophetic message. Allah shows us that the only sign they will accept is the punishment itself. It is at this point that Allah instructs Prophet Nūḥ to build the Ark and prepare for the arrival of the punishment.

The story of Nūḥ and his people differs from future nations. The people of Nūḥ were given a long period of time to rethink their position while Prophet Nūḥ was building this massive vessel. Yet, instead of reflecting and taking heed, they decided to waste their time mocking him, his people, and the Ark, diving even deeper into their disbelief.

The level of disbelief exemplified so far was drastic, however, as the story progresses, we come to realize that the people of Nūḥ went even further. As if the arrogance we have seen was not bad enough already, Allah shows us that a person's disbelief can extend even into the midst of experiencing the punishment from Allah. This is relayed to us through the story of the son of Nūḥ. Even when the waves reached the heights of mountains, his own son still refused to acknowledge that his father, Nūḥ, was speaking the truth. He persisted in following his own way instead of the way Allah commanded. This account emphasizes that disbelief can become so deep-rooted that nothing will influence a person who has fully committed themselves to it. Therefore, sometimes the only recourse for a believer is not to be attached to converting people but rather patiently wait for Allah to bring forth the outcome.

ĀYĀT
50-69

Once again, we are presented with more examples of Prophets preaching the same simple message: to worship and obey their Creator. This time, it is demonstrated in the stories of the people of ʿĀd and Thamūd.

In the case of ʿĀd, we should note how Prophet Hūd informs them that, in addition to the common sense entailed in worshipping their Creator, they will see the positive results in their material life if they follow this guidance.

Yet, just as with the people of Nūḥ before them, the people of ʿĀd disregarded common sense and any material benefits that would come with accepting his message, stating a lack of proof from Allah. Once again, they opted to take their chances by opposing the message and facing the punishment, instead of submitting and finding salvation. So they received the punishment that was promised to them.

In the case of Thamūd, they received the same clear message of monotheism. They had the additional advantage of being given a supernatural sign; the abnormally gigantic camel that emerged from the wall of a mountain of their choosing. This was an obvious sign that they were able to witness with their own eyes. The manifestation of this sign was relevant to them because they had mastered the art of carving their homes from mountains. All they had to do was accept this as proof from Allah and submit to the guidance. Instead, they killed the camel and incited the punishment they knew would come as a result. They even waited for days, confident that nothing could destroy their rock-solid homes. Nonetheless, Allah destroyed them with sound, thereby ensuring that their homes were spared and could serve as a lesson for generations to come.

In both the cases of ʿĀd and Thamūd, we see the consistent theme of disbelievers rejecting reason, invoking the punishment of Allah by asking to experience it, and threatening or belittling the Messengers instead of focusing on the truth of their message. All these behaviours prove the inflexibility of people who are adamant about their disbelief in Allah.

“Sometimes the only recourse for a believer is not to be attached to converting people but rather patiently wait for Allah to bring forth the outcome.

ĀYĀT
70-83

In this section Allah shows us a different way in which his punishment manifests, through the story of the people of Lūṭ. Before that, however, we learn about how Allah can punish the disbelievers while simultaneously bringing benefit to the believers.

We see this in the story of Ibrāhīm where Allah gives him news of an entire lineage of believers who will come from him and his wife, including the miraculous birth of Isḥāq, which foreshadows the miraculous births of later descendants: Prophets Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā.

At the same time, the angels that impart this good news are on their way to punish the people of Lūṭ. As we see, the people of Lūṭ were already deeply settled in their rejection of guidance. Moreover, they were employing all means to oppose the teachings of Prophet Lūṭ. His people were so inflexible and belligerent that they boldly violated his household to fulfil their homosexual desires.

As we can see in this story, this is what the disbelievers chose to do while disregarding the consequences. So Allah gave them the punishment that was promised to them for persisting in disbelief and sin, showing them that in one day, Allah can *quite literally* turn their world upside down. And once such punishment begins, there is nothing they can do to stop it.

ĀYĀT
84-104

In this section, we arrive at the story of Shuʿayb and his ministry of the people of Midian. He presents them with the same theological proposal of worshipping their Creator, seeking His forgiveness, and ensuring fair dealing when conducting business. Instead of being reasonable and considering the value of the morals behind his message, they mocked his prayer, flaunted their freedom of choice, and belittled him. Allah shows us that the cordial approach taken by Prophet Shuʿayb and his gracious disposition did not diminish their brash approach and disrespectful behaviour. Instead, even with full

knowledge of what had happened to the former disbelieving nations, they preferred to see the punishment for themselves instead of reflecting on what their Prophet had to say. Once again, as with all the stories that preceded theirs, they suffered a fate of punishment tailored to them.

Allah then demonstrates how the Pharaoh faced a similarly tragic end when he chose to reject all the evidence of the truth, abandon reason, ignore the miracles, and fight against Prophet Mūsā.

Allah concludes these stories by emphasizing how each of them has the same ending, and how the result of disbelief never changes. Collectively, these stories provide sufficient proof to convince anyone who values their wellbeing in the afterlife.

ĀYĀT
105-123

Since all sincere and reasonable people would accept guidance that ensures their eternal salvation, it is vital that they know exactly what this entails. Such knowledge allows them to prepare for such salvation and to avoid the fate of the disbelieving people of the past. Hence, at this point, Allah begins revealing the realities of the Day of Judgement, describing the opposite states of the people who believed and those who disbelieved.

Allah concludes the surah by giving the Prophet general instructions to stay the course and not to be deterred by the transgressions of his opponents. It is worth noting that Allah created human beings with the ability to choose, which brings with it the responsibility to do what is good for humanity and for the environment. If they choose to benefit the society, Allah will increase their blessings and reward them, but if they choose to spread harm, He will give them the punishment they deserve. Such punishment is only delivered after they reject the appeals of the Messengers He sends to them. If we comprehend this, then no believer should ever fall into despair, because in the end, Divine justice will always be served.

SURAH YŪSUF

ĀYĀT
1-20

Now that Allah has given us meta-narratives of the paths of belief and disbelief through the summarized stories of entire nations, He now presents the same narrative condensed into the story of a single individual. These āyāt will take us through a detailed exposition of the story of Prophet Yūsuf . The story will allow us to witness an example of how the undercurrent of Divine justice irresistibly manifests itself in people's lives, regardless of how much they try to avoid it.

The story of Prophet Yūsuf can be divided into four general stages. In this section, Allah introduces the first stage: his childhood. Here, Allah sets the stage by showing us the seeds of belief that have been placed in the heart of Prophet Yūsuf, while the seeds of disbelief begin to take root in his brothers, initially in the form of jealousy.

Similar to the beginning of most conflicts between good and evil, the story begins with the wrongdoers plotting to undermine the one who is good. In this case, his brothers plot to abandon Prophet Yūsuf and leave him to be discovered by strangers. Instead of accepting the decree of Allah, by acknowledging the Prophetic privilege of their brother and the Prophetic guidance of their father, they decided to fight against it. In parallel, they devised an elaborate scheme to justify their actions. The story that unfolds here is just a small example of the general behaviour of nations that reject their Prophets. Nevertheless, in keeping with previous examples, Allah is not deceived by their plots and reveals them to His Prophet. Despite knowing this bitter truth, the Prophets always remain patient.

ĀYĀT
21-35

We now enter into the second stage of Prophet Yūsuf's story: his youth. Here, we find that Allah turned the misfortune he suffered (i.e. estrangement and enslavement) into an opportunity to establish himself in an environment safe from his brothers. This also gave him the freedom to develop his spiritual abilities. In this, we see that what might look like the success of the disbelievers is, in reality, a means of facilitating success for the believer.

Nevertheless, we find that Prophet Yūsuf is still not free of the transgressions of disbelievers. At this point, he is not tested by the jealousy of his brothers, but rather, by the lust of the mistress of the house he resides in as she attempts to force him to disobey Allah against his will.

Here we can identify parallels with the behaviour of disbelievers when they are unable to expel the Prophets and their followers and attempt to lure them instead. Just as the mistress resorted to forcing her will on Prophet Yūsuf when her allurements failed, similarly, disbelieving nations will eventually resort to more aggressive tactics when they fail to convince believers into abandoning their religious guidance and lifestyle. If it were not for just and reasonable leaders that prevent this from happening, society would eventually be ruined. In this story, we find that the head of the household was reasonable enough to see through the schemes of his wife, and he rightfully took the side of the Prophet.

Yet, we also learn that even a reasonable leader does not have the power to fully protect the believer from the harm of an unjust society, and so we find that Prophet Yūsuf is eventually imprisoned when his opponents can no longer tolerate his piety. This is not uncommon in many oppressive societies where piety starts being considered a crime when the pious unapologetically challenge the immoral fabric of the nation.

Once all the efforts of the disbelievers' schemes against the righteous have been exhausted, the believers will find their victory in the most unexpected ways.

ĀYĀT
36-51

In this section we enter into the third stage: his isolation. Among several stories of Prophets and pious believers we find that there is a period when they are isolated from society. We find this in the story of Mūsā when he is a fugitive, the People of the Cave, the story of Maryam before the birth of ʿĪsā, and more. In this aspect, the life of Prophet Yūsuf was no different.

During this stage of isolation, we learn how Prophet Yūsuf is refining himself and expanding his spiritual depth. Once again, Allah shows us that even in this seemingly unfortunate situation, there is a hidden blessing. Here, we will learn that in their attempts to suppress Prophet Yūsuf, they instead provided him with the keys to liberating himself. Through this he was able to liberate himself not only from jail, but also from slavery altogether. Moreover, he was able to position himself such that he became among the most powerful men in one of the most powerful nations at the time.

In this section, Allah teaches us a lesson on how to serve those who are at the bottom of the social order. Moreover, He educates us on how Divine success lies in humility, patience, and dedication to the truth, regardless of its consequences in this world. As we see in these āyāt, the dedication exemplified by Prophet Yūsuf in sharing guidance and serving his fellow inmates was the seed that led him directly to his freedom.

Similarly, once all the efforts of the disbelievers' schemes against the righteous have been exhausted, the believers will find their victory in the most unexpected ways. If they trust in the plan set forth by Allah while patiently waiting for His decree, they will find themselves in a better position than they previously were. Moreover, they might even win over their opponents, as we see in the final stage of the story of Prophet Yūsuf detailed in the following Juz.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Juz B

VICTORY OF THE BELIEVER

ĀYĀT
52-111

Continuing on the theme of the previous Juz, we enter into the last stage of the story of Prophet Yūsuf: his victory.

In these āyāt, Allah shows us that truth always manifests itself at the end and we see the woman finally admit to the innocence of Prophet Yūsuf. Moreover, in a surprising turn of events, even the main antagonist of this part of the story personally apologizes to the Prophet and courageously becomes one of his greatest advocates. Allah shows us that He made this situation inevitable by creating a worldly need that could only be fulfilled by the vindication of Prophet Yūsuf. Thus, here we witness how Divine justice works in mysterious ways to draw people to guidance in a manner that only Divine wisdom can facilitate.

Once Prophet Yūsuf is vindicated and takes his prestigious role as the treasurer of Egypt, we witness the wisdom of Allah yet again, in the form of the drought which produces another tangible need. This need brings the original opponents of Prophet Yūsuf to his very doorstep. Here we see how the Prophet uses his position to force the truth to be exposed not through him, but through them.

We can observe similarities between the strategy he adopted to influence the woman to free him from prison and that with which he influenced his brothers to admit their plot against him. In both cases, he waited for Allah to place him in an indispensable role where the need for him was unquestionable. He then used that position of advantage and control to create the opportunity to expose the truth. We also came across this approach previously when Prophet Yūsuf was in prison. He employed this strategy when the inmates needed him to interpret their dreams by converting the situation into an opportunity to deliver his message of worshipping Allah.

Hence, in this section, we see the details of how, with a stroke of genius inspired by Allah, Prophet Yūsuf devises an elaborate plan to save his younger brother from suffering the same fate that he did, while at the same time reuniting him with his father. Ultimately, these actions placed his older brothers in a humbling position that left them no choice but to admit to what they had done to him and to seek forgiveness.

In the end, we learn that by following Prophet Yūsuf, his brothers were not only ennobled spiritually, but also materially. Furthermore, the actions that transpired showed that their own egos were the sole reason for their humiliation. We also learn that despite how bad their crimes were, Allah and His Prophet still forgave them. Such a forgiving end is what is promised to all individuals who return to Allah, regardless of how terrible their sins have been. So long as they repent before there death, there is always an opportunity to reap the benefits of faith. This concludes the extensive example Allah gives us of the inevitability of the success of belief and the failure of disbelief.

Now that Allah has demonstrated the manifestation of His decree, He then addresses the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ directly, explaining the morals of the story. The main lesson is that most people will choose to disbelieve and ignore the natural miracles He presents to them on a daily basis, and this is how human behaviour has remained throughout history. Therefore, people of faith should simply be patient with the decree of Allah. They should continue to follow His guidance and look forward to attaining their reward because His promise will never fail.

SURAH AL-RA'D

ĀYĀT
1-18

At the end of Surah *Yūsuf,* Allah informs us that people witness His signs everyday yet they simply choose to ignore them. Thus, in this surah, Allah elaborates on some of these signs.

In this section, Allah challenges us to observe the miracle of how the heavens and the earth were constructed. He then directs us to study the earth and vegetation, and the way He has designed it in perfect harmony. If we can accept that one type of water sustains all living things and brings various types of produce, then it should be extremely obvious to us that Allah is the single source of all creation and that it is He who brings the countless wonders we see around us.

Allah addresses the disbelievers, chastising them for rejecting these obvious signs and rushing to sin. Moreover, He berates them for ignoring the fact that He is All-Aware of what they are doing and protects them with His angels from the innumerable dangers that they face.

Allah continues by showing us how disbelief contradicts common sense. How can a person deny the power of Allah and His punishment when they see lightning and hear thunder? Through signs like these, He has made it clear that no one can or will save a person from Allah except Allah. And that none of the other things that are worshipped have the power to produce even a single sip of water to their worshippers. So the only way that a person can disbelieve in Him and His signs is if they stop using their own intelligence and ignore their ability to see and hear, as those who use their senses would certainly understand the signs.

ĀYĀT
19-43

At this point, Allah provides us with a description of the people who believe in these signs, citing their commitment to their relationship with Allah and to those whom He commands us to uphold ties with. Conversely, those who disbelieve in His signs are fundamentally not interested in building these relationships nor will they ever be satisfied with the miracles presented to them. They will always ask for more unnecessary proof, just as the disbelieving nations before them did.

So as the surah concludes, Allah instructs the Prophet that he has sufficient proof of Allah in the Qur'an. Given all these proofs, the task of the Prophet is simply to relay the message. And He is sufficient as a witness to establish that the Prophet has fulfilled his responsibility.

SURAH IBRĀHĪM

ĀYĀT
1-20

In Surah *al-Raʿd,* Allah outlined the physical signs and made them a means for people to understand His attributes. In contrast, in this surah, Allah details the spiritual signs of His lordship in how He saves people from the darkness of ignorance with the light of His guidance.

As an example, He shows how He sends His Messengers with the same message, but their language and method of delivery is uniquely tailored to each nation. He reminds us of the stories of the nations before us, which, at this point, have been explained in detail in previous surahs. Moreover, he demonstrates how all these nations used similar arguments against their Prophets. First, they claimed a human being could not receive revelation from Allah. When this argument failed, they turned to threatening to banish

and ruin their Prophet. Yet, we find that in each case the believers were saved while it was the disbelievers that were ruined and replaced by other communities.

ĀYĀT
21-27

Allah does not only protect those who believe in Him from the darkness of ignorance in this world, but also in the next. In this section, Allah provides us with a detailed account of how the ignorance of disbelievers extends to the Hereafter.

The example He gives us here is the setting where the disbelievers are arguing with each other in Hell. We find the followers blaming their leaders, while the leaders make excuses for their actions. Meanwhile, the devil exposes all of them; bearing witness that each of them intentionally disbelieved and are deserving of all the punishment that they are receiving.

Allah also presents us with the opposing picture: the benefits enjoyed by the believers. It is they who are saved from all of this ignorance and punishment, enjoying the fruits of Paradise as a reward for following the truth and guidance and submitting to Allah.

Allah shows us the morals behind these examples. He teaches us that guidance is like a good tree that only produces good, while misguidance is like a shallow rooted bush that has no fruit or stability. Likewise, those who follow the guidance of the Qur'an will find themselves rooted in reason and truth, and they will reap its benefits in all situations. On the other hand, those who reject guidance and neglect common sense can neither be consistent nor in harmony with their reality. In the long run, none of their work will bear benefit or save them from the punishment.

“Allah fulfils the promise of guiding people from darkness to light by teaching us the keys to success and how to avoid the traps of misguidance.

ĀYĀT
28-52

As we come to the conclusion of the surah and the Juz, we find that Allah fulfils the promise of guiding people from darkness to light by teaching us the keys to success and how to avoid the traps of misguidance.

He does this by explaining how all things in creation are already designed to serve us and sustain us. We are already promised sustenance and Divine support; all we have to do is follow the guidance.

Allah shows us how this looks when it is applied, exemplified through the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm. During his time, he was one of the few believers that remained in the entire world. Despite this, multiple nations of believers came into existence through his lineage with the help of Allah. Moreover, it was through his work and prayer that those nations were sent Prophets and Messengers. Allah shows us that, through the efforts of Prophet Ibrāhīm, a barren land in the desert of Makkah produced the wealthiest and most powerful believing nation in human history. A nation replete with every kind of worldly crop from all over the world, and the greatest Prophet ever sent to mankind.

Allah then shows us how this Divine support does not end in this world, but also extends to the next as forgiveness from Allah and Paradise.

Meanwhile, those who reject guidance abuse the blessings of Allah by using them as a means for their disbelief. They will find nothing but disappointment in this life, and especially in the Hereafter, so much so that they will plead to have another chance to go back to their previous life and make up for their disbelief. Hence, Allah advises us not to be concerned about what the disbelievers do, but rather place our concern in spreading the message of guidance and in helping save people from the punishment through the Qur'an. This is the only message that Allah wants us to deliver so that the truth can be manifested, and people can decide for themselves if they want to be saved from the darkness and adopt the path of light.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Juz 14

FORTIFYING FAITH

SURAH AL-ḤIJR

ĀYĀT 1-25

In Surah *al-Raʿd,* we learned of the signs through which guidance and misguidance manifest. Now we enter into Surah *al-Ḥijr* where Allah teaches us how restrictive misguidance is for people of disbelief. Misguidance limits disbelievers from fulfilling their full spiritual and moral potential. Moreover, such restrictions lead to an even greater impediment that they will experience in the Hereafter.

Once again, Allah shows us how the Qur'an contains all the guidance and signs that we need. To demonstrate this, we are reminded of how previous, well-established nations were given guidance, similar to that detailed in the Qur'an, and how they opposed it, thus, bringing about their own destruction. Unlike the revelations of the past that were abandoned, Allah has promised that this one will be Divinely protected and fully preserved for future generations. The fulfilling of this promise, in itself, is one of the miracles of this Book.

Nevertheless, Allah reminds us that the disbelievers will never accept a sign or miracle shown to them. They do not contemplate the design of the stars, the earth, the wind, the clouds and rain, and all the natural phenomena that He exhibits every day. These are all examples of the spiritual and intellectual restrictions that disbelievers have imposed on themselves and the basis on which they reject the Qur'an.

ĀYĀT 26-56

Through this section, Allah will teach us the history of this limited view of reality, starting with the beginning of human existence, when Iblīs disobeyed the command of Allah. Here we find that,

unlike the angels, Iblīs refused to see the Divine wisdom behind Ādam's creation. It is worth recalling from Surah *al-Baqarah* how Allah had clearly demonstrated the superiority of Ādam over the rest of His creation by the knowledge He had bestowed upon him. In this surah, we find that Iblīs decided to restrict his point of view purely to the material forms, as opposed to the spiritual realities taught by Allah, and therefore, wilfully lead himself to misguidance. Allah makes it clear to him – and to us – that he has no control over the misguidance of human beings unless they themselves lack in their sincerity to Allah, choose to go astray, and as a consequence, follow in the footsteps of Iblīs.

Allah further demonstrates how this self-imposed restriction unfolds by exhibiting the contrast between the sincerity of Prophet Ibrāhīm and the immorality of the people of Lūṭ. Prophet Ibrāhīm maintained a healthy balance of fear and hope in Allah, and therefore did what was in his capacity to accommodate and honour his guests, while also seeking the mercy of Allah and fearing His punishment. Later, he learned that they are angels, and he received the good news that Allah will expand his lineage and extend His blessings.

ĀYĀT
57-99

In this section, we learn that the same angels that had brought good news to Prophet Ibrāhīm then visited the people of Lūṭ, albeit for a very different reason. Here Allah reveals different details about this visit than those relayed in the previous surah, highlighting the points that show the extent to which they had become narrow-minded and restricted their reasoning.

In this story, we find the travellers experience the opposite treatment to that of Prophet Ibrāhīm. They were not greeted with peace. They were not served food. They were not engaged in pleasant conversation. Instead, they were hounded, tracked down to the door-

step of Lūṭ, and threatened with severe homosexual attacks. As a result, Allah literally turned their world upside down and tormented them in a way that reflected how they wilfully upended the nature of their own humanity.

Similarly, Allah reminds us of the destruction of the people of Midian and Thamūd, showing that there is no structure or defence that can protect criminal nations from the power of Divine justice.

Allah ends this surah by reminding the believers to extend their vision to the Hereafter, to understand that this world is only temporary, and that the opponents of guidance will ultimately answer for their crimes. Moreover, Allah says that since the disbelievers have restricted themselves to misguidance, He will limit their enjoyments to this world; they are destined to experience the restrictive punishments in the Hereafter. Meanwhile, those who look forward to their meeting with Allah must persevere and adhere to obeying Allah until their vision becomes reality.

SURAH AL-NAḤL

ĀYĀT 1-19

In this section, Allah builds on the final theme of Surah *al-Ḥijr,* where He instructs the believers to worship and maintain their faith in Him until certainty is attained. Allah begins Surah *al-Naḥl* with the declaration that His promise has already been decreed even before their certainty arrives. Through this surah Allah will demonstrate this reality.

First, Allah details how various aspects of nature point towards His power and control. Specifically, He shows us how He made different aspects of creation to benefit us without us having any initial influence over them. He cites how these miracles manifest in the

animals, the weather, vegetation, astronomical cycles, the ocean and its contents, the land we travel on, and even the stars. All of these matters are clearly being guided and managed by Allah to serve man for a purpose. Allah sends down revelation to teach us that these facilities exist to help us in serving Him. They are also sent to allow us to experience the purpose for which they were created. With that said, it is important to note that, just as this world and all its creations have a beginning, they must also have an end.

ĀYĀT
20-37

Given that Allah has thoroughly designed everything to sustain humanity, it only makes sense to believe that He also knows everything there is to know about humanity. Therefore, Allah explains to us how it is irrational for a person to think that they could somehow fool Allah or hide their thoughts and intentions from Him. Those who delude themselves into thinking this way are only furthering their own destruction in the Hereafter, which begins from the moment they see the Angel of Death.

Meanwhile, those who submit to the truth will reap the benefits of Paradise, and they will attain the certainty of the promise Allah gave us, as was mentioned at the end of Surah *al-Ḥijr*. Once again, starting from the moment they see the Angel of Death.

Allah teaches us what the moral behind this is; specifically, that waiting until the Day of Judgment to finally admit to the truth of this message is not an option. Each person's reckoning will begin long before that; at the moment of their death. Therefore, there is no benefit in the arguments that disbelievers give in their attempts to justify why they do not believe in the Resurrection. In fact, their arguments only further confirm that they have no interest in accepting the truth, and there is nothing that any Prophet can do to change that if Allah allows them to maintain their disbelief.

ĀYĀT 38-63

At this point, Allah makes it clear that all of these signs are given to people to leave them with no excuse on the Day of Judgment. Messengers have been sent to them. Revelations have been taught to them. The Qur'an has revealed signs to them within the world around them. And if Allah wants, He can put them in such a position that they would be forced to acknowledge His authority over them. It suffices to say that they have experienced this. Even then, they return to disbelief once they feel safe, wrongfully attributing things to Him that they despise.

ĀYĀT 64-83

Even after all of the signs previously mentioned to prove the truth of this guidance, Allah, out of His mercy towards human beings, still provides us with more signs to reflect upon. He describes how He brings us water from the sky that brings life to the earth, thereby facilitating the miraculous production of milk from our livestock and the miraculous production of honey through the Divine inspiration of bees. All three of these miracles are vital and highly beneficial for human beings. And in all three cases, human beings have no control over these processes.

Just as Allah controls the way our sustenance is produced from practically nothing, Allah has full control over the process of life and death. Furthermore, He continues to create us in pairs to enable us to settle and find peace in one another. Have the disbelievers not considered how human life would be maintained if Allah had only created one gender?

Through all of these signs, Allah is proving to us why it is irrational to ignore the fact that all of these blessings come from the same source. Now that we have established that they all serve the same purpose, the only correct conclusion is that they must be controlled by the same Creator.

Therefore, if we can believe that this is the truth, then it is not difficult to accept that the Resurrection is possible. Rather, the Resurrection is inevitable if Allah decrees it, just as He decreed for all of these signs to exist.

Allah then points at the signs of His attributes by directing us to reflect on how we, as humans, were created with no knowledge. Moreover, He describes how He controls the balances in nature that allows birds to fly, and how our homes, clothing, and even mountains and shade work in our favour. With that, Allah proves to the Prophet that there is nothing he can do to guide a person who recognizes these signs and sees the unified purpose and design within them, yet still refuses to submit to the One who created them and believe in His promise of the Resurrection.

ĀYĀT
84-97

Now that an extensive list of evidence has been established regarding the power of Allah and His ability to resurrect life, Allah exposes the situation the disbelievers will find themselves in on the Day of Resurrection. He also clarifies how no one will be able to save them from the torment that they refused to believe in.

As for the believers, Allah addresses them directly and gives them the instructions that they will need to prepare for the Resurrection. In sum, He draws our attention to the areas of life where the devil will incite the most temptation. Allah knows that the devil's strategy is to incite fear of death and loss of wealth. Hence, He emphasizes that we need to uphold justice and avoid the temptation of undermining each other and selling out our religion for worldly gain. Knowing that these issues are a natural weakness for humanity, Allah guarantees that those who uphold these commands will enjoy a good life.

Just as Allah controls the way our sustenance is produced from practically nothing, Allah has full control over the process of life and death.

ĀYĀT 98-110

There are two general avenues that the devils will use to misguide believers. The first is through material means and the second involves spiritual means. Allah detailed the material factors in the previous section: fear of death and loss of wealth. Now, He directs our attention to the spiritual factors.

While the material protection from misguidance is established by upholding justice, spiritual guidance is maintained through upholding our relationship with the Qur'an and through the remembrance *(dhikr)* of Allah. While doing this, we must avoid allowing anyone to tamper and distort the revelation. Moreover, we must maintain our belief in the revelation in the face of all the intellectual attacks that its opponents make against it and against the believers who adhere to it.

It is possible that some people may be forced to renounce the faith outwardly. Allah makes a clear distinction between such people and those who betray the religion willingly. Moreover, He delineates what the consequences are for each group. Those who willingly renounce faith without repenting will be punished, while those whose hearts never renounced it will be pardoned.

ĀYĀT 111-128

In this section, Allah introduces another form of spiritual misguidance that must be avoided. In the previous *āyāt,* He discussed the possible doubts that lead to disbelief in the validity of the Qur'an. Now, Allah addresses the issue of changing His laws and how this, too, can lead the believers to a fateful end.

Allah shows us that such misguidance originates as a consequence of believers becoming ungrateful for the blessings that have been given to them. In doing so, they forget that the laws of Allah were decreed in their best interest. Instead of staying within the limits of these laws, they attempt to attain more worldly good by modify-

ing the Divine laws; specifically, by wrongfully making things permissible or impermissible without Divine permission.

In the end, Allah reminds us that this was the same path that was taken by the Jews in the past, as we learnt in previous surahs, and it only resulted in more hardship and ultimate failure in this life and the next.

In comparison, Allah relays to us the example of Ibrāhīm. Through this, He shows us how matters progress when a believer upholds his commitment to Allah by following the straightforward path of truth. Allah demonstrates the difference between the upright religion of the grateful and the twisted approaches of the ungrateful, like the People of the Sabbath who created their restrictions by going to extremes.

In conclusion, Allah provides the believers with basic instructions on how to maintain their integrity when dealing with their opponents. This is possible by always speaking well, maintaining fairness even when retaliating, and being spiritually and emotionally resilient, knowing that Allah will be with those who remain righteous. If they abide by these principles, no misguidance can lead them astray. Furthermore, they can always be certain of the promise of Allah as He declared in the beginning of the surah.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Juz 15

THE HONORING OF MANKIND

SURAH AL-ISRĀ'

ĀYĀT
1-22

Towards the end of Surah *al-Naḥl,* Allah instructed the believers on how to avoid misguidance externally and internally. He then concludes with striking examples of Prophet Ibrāhīm and the deviant faction of the Children of Israel (the People of the Sabbath). These are employed as reference points for us to allow us to learn how religion should and should not be practiced, respectively.

This surah, which is referred to as Surah *Banī Isrā'īl,* continues upon this theme by describing the connection and differences between the legacies of two lines of descendants of Ibrāhīm; through the community of Mūsā and through the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

For the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Allah shows us that he has reached a level of closeness to Allah that no other Prophet has ever reached by witnessing the greatest signs of Allah and uniting the legacies of both lineages of Prophet Ibrāhīm. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ achieves this through the night journey in which Allah brought him from the Kaaba in Makkah to al-Aqsa in Jerusalem.

However, with such privilege comes great responsibility. Allah teaches us how that responsibility can be neglected through the example of the Children of Israel. He shows us how they abandoned the teachings of Prophet Mūsā, broke their covenant, spread corruption on the earth, and as a result, went through various cycles of ruin as they did not return to Allah and His guidance.

Similarly, Allah has privileged all of humanity by sending them the greatest Prophet and giving them the Qur'an so that they can uphold their responsibility as vicegerents in the world. Given their great responsibility, humans will be held accountable for how they fulfil their

covenant with Allah, just like the Children of Israel. For those who choose to follow the guidance, Allah will increase their guidance and benefit. However, those who opt for misguidance will follow a path that will eventually lead to their ruin after a temporary enjoyment of this life, as Allah has demonstrated throughout history.

ĀYĀT 23-39

At this point, Allah highlights the elements that form the foundation of this new covenant in a similar way as He did in Surah al-Baqarah for the Children of Israel. He instructs us to:

- Worship Him alone.
- Honour our parents.
- Give the reasonable amount of charity owed to our relatives, the poor, and the traveller.
- Not terminate our own children.
- Not fornicate.
- Not kill the innocent.
- Not take advantage of the orphan's wealth.
- Not commit fraud in any way.
- Not lie about what we know.
- Avoid arrogance.

ĀYĀT 40-57

Now that the covenant has been clarified, Allah addresses the disbelievers. He makes it clear that the Qur'an has thoroughly explained the truth of who He is and of His commandments, leaving no room for doubt or assumption. So anyone who disbelieves is not doing so out of reason, but rather due to self-imposed blindness to reality. Of course, Allah knows this because He is fully aware of their secret conversations and inner thoughts.

No matter what argument they choose to use, Allah responds with a logical answer which can be understood through common sense. If they ask, "How can we be resurrected from dirt?" He responds, "Just as I made you from nothing the first time."

When they doubt when and how this will happen, Allah describes to them exactly how it will happen and what that day will look like. In fact, through all the revelations He has given Messengers in history, He has already taught them how He takes people to account, how He applies His mercy and punishment, and what a person can do to protect themselves from the punishment on that Day. Every aspect of the Resurrection and reckoning has been thoroughly explained.

ĀYĀT
58-69

Since Allah has demonstrated that His guidance has been delivered throughout history, He now returns to the subject of holding nations accountable for abandoning guidance. He proves to us that, in every case, when the undeniable signs are brought to nations of the past, the majority of people rejected them. Even when the signs were supernatural in nature, the people still persisted in disbelief and the miracles had no impact on them at all.

The reason for this is clarified in the story that exhibits the arrogance of Iblīs. He refused to accept the leadership of Ādam because he placed his faith in material things instead of the revelation of Allah which Ādam possessed. To try to prove that he was right, Iblīs centred his entire strategy on undermining human beings by convincing them to adopt his deviant attachment to material things.

In response, Allah reminds us how fragile those material attachments are and gives examples of how, at any moment, our fortune can change, regardless of whether we are on the land or the sea. It is in such circumstances that we realize that nothing could truly benefit or harm us but Allah.

“Allah instructs us to avoid the paths of previous nations that resulted in spiritual blindness and self-ruin.

ĀYĀT 70-84

Allah knows that the attachment of human beings to material things is due to their false sense of control over them. Therefore, He draws our attention to the fact that He honoured us by making the world subservient to us. However, with such a position comes the responsibility to serve Allah according to His will, knowing that we will be taken to account for how we behave.

Allah instructs us to avoid the paths of previous nations that resulted in spiritual blindness and self-ruin. We can avoid this by following the Prophet, maintaining our prayers, and attaching ourselves to the Qur'an. Not only will the Qur'an heal us, but it will also instil mercy in our lives.

Otherwise, we will be like the people who live their lives between arrogance and despair; never accepting guidance and never addressing their own self-destructive behaviour.

ĀYĀT 85-98

Through this section, Allah emphasizes to us how blessed we are to have the Qur'an. It is unrivalled in its truth and provides a comprehensive set of instructions. Accordingly, anyone who rejects it will be guided by almost anything. It is as if they are unable to use any of their natural senses to arrive at the truth.

Allah gives us an example of how this looks by taking us back to the story of Prophet Mūsā and the Pharaoh. However, in this surah, Allah reveals new dialogue between them that was not mentioned before. In it, He shows how Mūsā made it clear that he knew the Pharaoh had no excuse to reject the miracles and signs that he witnessed.

Just like Prophet Mūsā, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ must also expect to face similar rejection. Only those people who respect knowledge and reason over ego and desire will see the value in his message. Therefore, the only recourse for believers is to turn to Allah and show gratitude for being chosen as His servants. Similarly, we

should show gratitude for the fact that He chose us to belong to the nation of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the only servant to ascend the heavens to bring us guidance.

SURAH AL-KAHF

ĀYĀT 1-26

Many of the previous surahs focused on stories of nations that rejected guidance. Here, in Surah *al-Kahf,* we find that Allah offers examples of various people who did follow guidance, and how it saved them from suffering the same fate as the disbelievers. This serves as yet another proof of the Qur'an being the true guidance that will lead to salvation, as Divine guidance of the past led the people in this surah to their salvation.

Allah begins this surah by relaying to us the story of the People of the Cave. We learn that they were youth who realized that, if they wanted to follow Divine guidance, they would have to isolate themselves from the disbelieving people and their environment.

Consequently, Allah used their lives as a sign for future believing generations, by giving them a miraculous life. Through this, he provided humanity with clear proof that He is the Creator and that the Resurrection is a reality. Moreover, through this sign, Allah is also sending a message to the followers of previous Abrahamic faiths. He demonstrates how His knowledge encompasses every matter, including the stories and knowledge that they themselves have forgotten, that they dispute about, or those they hide; such as this story of the People of the Cave.

ĀYĀT 27-49

The next story that Allah gives us demonstrates how the actions of believers lead to heavenly bliss, while the actions of those who are disbelieving and ungrateful to Allah only lead to disappointment and failure. Here we are introduced to two people. One of them is a believer who is grateful for whatever Allah has given him, while the other has

been given abundant wealth but developed arrogance and a sense of entitlement over those people lacking such wealth. He confused wealth in this life for the favours promised to us by Allah in the Hereafter.

Hence, Allah taught the ungrateful man a lesson on humility by destroying his wealth with a simple change of the weather, while the grateful believer sought the favour of Allah through humility and gratitude.

All of this points to the fact that Allah has reserved true success and blessings for those who submit to Him and serve Him. In contrast, those who ignore the authority of Allah over them will be deluded by the traps of this world and become obsessed with them. However, they will discover that such pleasures will only last a short while after which they will be taken away from them and replaced with torment in the Hereafter.

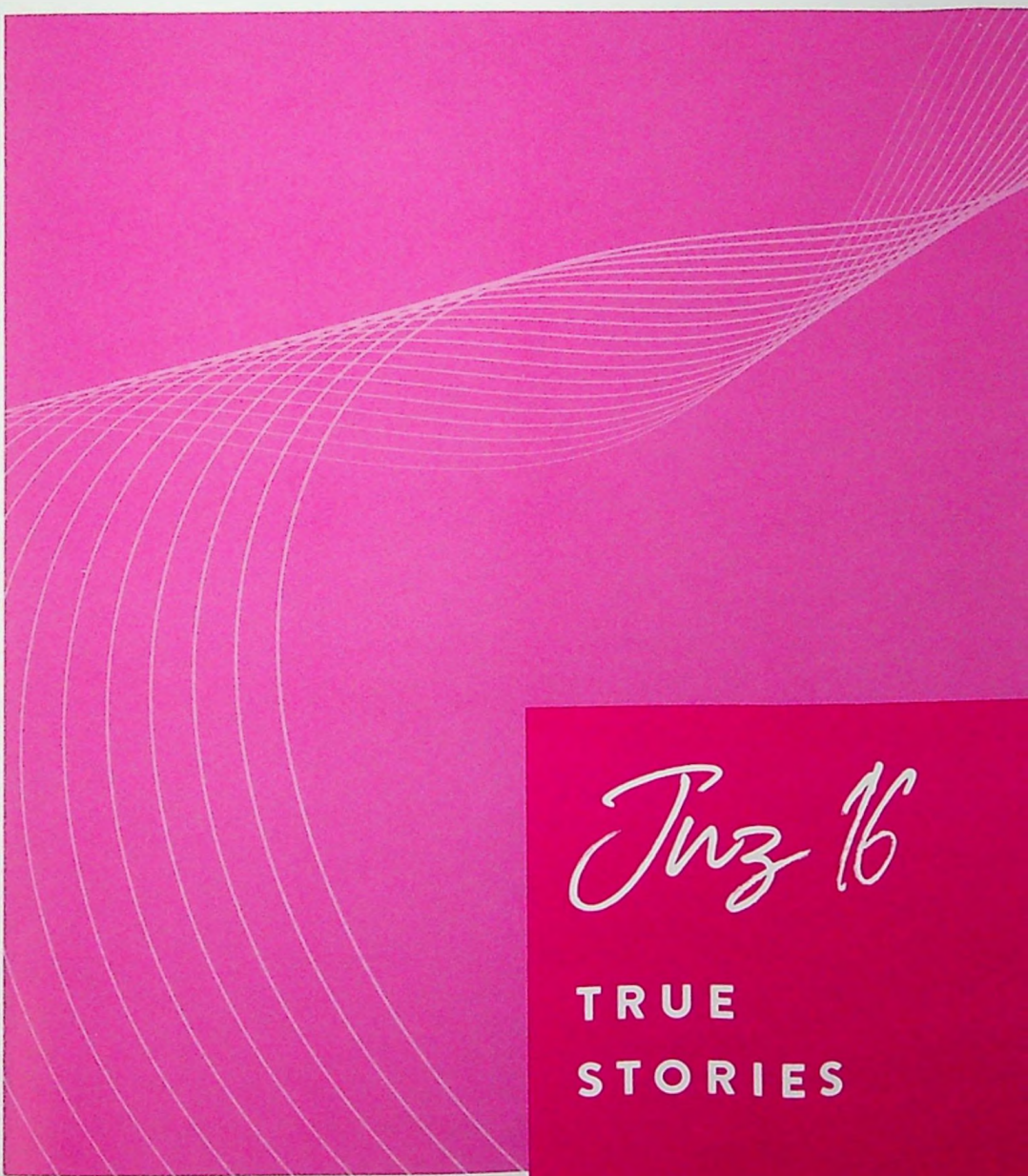
ĀYĀT
50-74

As this Juz comes to a close, Allah rhetorically questions the rationale of following someone who would lead one to Hell. The Qur'an is clearly promising success and bliss in this life and the next, and Allah is clearly the One who created the heavens and the earth. Accordingly, how could one ignore the signs and reject the possibility of the Day of Judgment after all the examples, historic references, and reasoning that are elaborated in the Qur'an?

Even though most people reject Allah, He still shows humanity an overwhelming amount of mercy by not immediately punishing them for their rebellion. Rather, He constantly protects them from most of the harm of their own actions, tolerates their infractions, and regularly sends them guidance.

A great example of this can be found in the story of Mūsā and al-Khiḍr. In this story, Allah teaches us numerous lessons on how His decree protects the interests of the righteous from the violations of the disbelievers, while simultaneously withholding the torment from the disbelievers and giving them respite. The details of this will be presented to us in the next Juz.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Juz 16

TRUE STORIES

ĀYĀT 75-82

This Juz continues exploring the themes of Surah *al-Kahf*. So far in this surah, we have seen how Divine guidance was upheld by people in their youth as well as how it was upheld by a person with wealth. As we arrive at the story of Mūsā and al-Khiḍr, we will learn how Divine guidance is upheld by a person with knowledge.

Throughout the story, we learn that there is a profound difference between knowledge and wisdom. Allah granted Prophet Mūsā knowledge of the book and instructed him to follow it. On the other hand, al-Khiḍr was given wisdom of the decree, and he was mandated to teach Prophet Mūsā how this wisdom manifested.

In this section we learn that human beings cannot judge Allah's decree based on what things appear to be at face value. There is Divine wisdom behind everything which protects the wellbeing of the righteous, even when it seems to harm them. This means that even when a boat is damaged, a child dies, or an oppressive town is given aid, none of these events are actually to the benefit of the wretched. Rather, the decree serves the best interests of the believers. Similarly, following the guidance of Allah and applying the teachings of the Qur'an should grant us utmost certainty. Regardless of how difficult it may be for our egos to accept, there is a greater wisdom and innumerable benefits in this guidance that always transcend the apparent situation. In the end, the believer should patiently serve Allah and look forward to receiving the good that He has in store for him.

ĀYĀT 83-110

Next, Allah brings us to the story of Dhū al-Qarnayn, where we see, once again, how Divine guidance is upheld, this time by a person of power. Here we learn that those people whom Allah has given re-

sources and power must use these means to provide justice where it is needed and protect the innocent from oppressive people. We also learn how Divine guidance inspires leaders to demonstrate creativity and utilise technology to devise long-term solutions for pressing issues. However, despite all the innovation, technology, and strategy that a leader may employ, he or she must accept the fact that all power ultimately comes from Allah. If He decrees something to change, that change is inevitable, no matter how much effort or how many resources one may invest in an attempt to make it last. In the end, nothing lasts but Allah.

As the surah concludes, we learn the fundamental morals of the different stories in Surah *al-Kahf*: that our actions will only bring us benefit if they are done purely for the sake of Allah, such as the youth's isolation, al-Khiḍr's fulfilment of Allah's commands, and the administration of Dhū al-Qarnayn. On the other hand, those who work to please other than Allah will find no lasting benefit for themselves, regardless of how much effort they apply to their work, like the man with the two gardens, Iblīs, or Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj. Allah's knowledge of reality is inexhaustible, and there is no truth that escapes Him. If He promises the believers their reward, then whoever places their faith in Him and strives for His cause can never fail.

SURAH MARYAM

ĀYĀT 1-34

In Surah *al-Kahf*, Allah presented examples of how He delivered aid to a variety of people who followed His guidance. In this surah, we will see how this Divine assistance is deployed to the Prophets themselves.

In this section, Allah narrates the story of Prophet Zakariyyā. In his story we learn that his miracle was initiated by a *du'ā'*, similar

to how the story of Maryam was initiated by the *duʿā'* of her mother. This is a recurring theme among the stories of the Prophets, where supernatural events are predicated upon supplications of the righteous. This story is no different.

Overall, this story sets the tone for the rest many of the stories that follow: a person is sincere in their worship and makes a *duʿā'*, Allah gives them a sign to follow, and then a miracle happens. In this case, Prophet Zakariyyā made a *duʿā'* – and where he made it was mentioned in Surah *Āl ʿImrān* – and Allah gave him a sign to follow, through which he received the miracle of his wife's pregnancy.

A similar pattern occurred with Maryam: she isolated herself to worship in seclusion, Allah sent her an angel, and there she was given her miracle in the form of Prophet ʿĪsā.

ĀYĀT
33-58

The historical events told in this story demonstrate the supreme attributes of Allah and His ability to do whatever He wills with His creation. It is illogical for such miracles to lead a person to worship His creation, like the manner in which people worship Prophet ʿĪsā. Rather, these miracles should give a person greater conviction in the power of Allah, and the appreciation that nothing could ever compare to Him and His authority.

This is why we are brought to the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm, who was born into a society where idolatry was widespread. Upon observing the stubbornness of his people, and their refusal to abandon disbelief, he leaves them to worship in peace. Allah gives Ibrāhīm his own miracles through the lives of his sons Ismāʿīl and Isḥāq. This section then goes on to list numerous other Prophets, and how they were all aided and guided by Allah.

Allah's knowledge of reality is inexhaustible, and there is no truth that escapes Him.

ĀYĀT
59-98

Now that Allah has established the true accounts of how His Prophets upheld their guidance, He turns our attention towards the Hereafter, expressing how the believers will flourish while the disbelievers will have to face the stark reality of being held accountable for their deeds. All the lies and arguments that the disbelievers made against Allah will be turned against them. Even their leaders and the devils who aided them will be brought forth, and they will all be made to answer for their crimes against Allah. Amongst the worst of these crimes is attributing a son to Him.

As the surah comes to a close, Allah provides explicit detail of how lonely every person who has not followed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ will feel on the Day of Judgment. He also makes it clear that this guidance is the only way to salvation, and He will accept no other path except the path that He has provided. Those who believe and follow the correct path will find the salvation that they were promised, just as the Prophets in this surah were promised. And those who reject it will be made to experience the consequences: the same devastating results as their disbelieving predecessors, in this life and in the next.

SURAH ṬĀHĀ

ĀYĀT
1-36

In the past few surahs, Allah has presented numerous examples proving how those who believe in Him will succeed, and how those who reject Him fail. This recurring theme is further emphasized due to the extreme loss and suffering that the Prophet and his Companions were going through, as well as the generations of followers who are destined to come after him. As the stories become increasingly intricate and thorough, revealing the methods and Divine plan of Allah's decree, they provide greater reassurance to the believers, inspiring them to continue adhering to His guidance. This

surah is no different. In fact, while Surah *al-Kahf* introduces stories of lesser-known figures in history, and Surah *Maryam* highlights the stories of more widely recognized Prophets, Surah *ṬāHā* goes into great depth about the details of Prophet Mūsā's struggles. His hardships, when compared to those of all other Prophets, bear the greatest resemblance to those Prophet Muhammad ﷺ faced during his mission. Moreover, Allah uses this surah to present the closest historical parallel of His Divine protection and victory, and how it is so evident that even his opponents of other Abrahamic faiths will acknowledge it.

Allah opens this surah by declaring that, ultimately, this Qur'an will not be a source of disappointment for Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and that his experience of success will be similar – and even greater – than the success of Prophet Mūsā.

Starting from the early stage of their Prophethood, we learn that both Prophet Mūsā and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ shared the same isolation that initiated their first revelations; Prophet Mūsā was at the valley of Ṭuwā, while Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was in the cave of Ḥirā'. We also learn how daunting Prophet Mūsā's task was: to return to Egypt and invite the Pharaoh to Islam thereby liberating the Children of Israel. The likelihood of him succeeding in this mission on his own seems impossible. But with Allah on his side, we find that success is inevitable. Similarly, the task of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to invite the Arabs to Islam and abandon the idols they had been worshipping for hundreds of years is an immense challenge, but with the help of Allah, his success is already written.

ĀYĀT
37-77

In this section, Allah reminds Prophet Mūsā of how he had consistently remained under His protection since his childhood. If one considers the chances of a baby floating down a river on its own, and subsequently being found, raised, and protected in the

household of the very man who had publicly ordered for babies like him to be killed, it would have been considered impossible. Nevertheless, this is the story of Prophet Mūsā which took place with Allah's permission. And just as Allah protected him in the house of the Pharaoh as an infant, Prophet Mūsā should have no doubt that He will continue to protect him now as a Prophet.

Just as promised, Allah did indeed protect him and his brother Hārūn, and we learn that they confronted the Pharaoh with numerous miracles. However, none of them had any effect on his heart. To counter any potential doubts one may have that these miracles were inherently unconvincing, Allah reveals to us how the Pharaoh himself unintentionally proved how conclusive these miracles were. Pharaoh recruited magicians to counter Prophet Mūsā, who themselves confirmed that these miracles were indeed from Allah and submitted to Him! This is how Allah turns the plots of His opponents against them. Likewise, any plot that is waged against Prophet Muhammad can be expected to fail in a similar manner.

ĀYĀT
78-98

In this section, we see more parallels between the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and that of Prophet Mūsā. Like Prophet Mūsā, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was inspired to leave his homeland and migrate to a blessed land that would be safer for his followers. In addition, Prophet Mūsā went out to a remote location to speak to his Lord, and even requested to see Him (as mentioned in Surah *al-Aʿrāf*) while Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was given the privilege of the Night Ascension.

Moreover, Prophet Mūsā brought new Divine laws to his people and struggled against the hypocrites to establish the framework for a faith-based civilization. Many years later, the Prophet did the same in Madinah.

Lastly, we discover that the champions of disbelief – Pharaoh and Sāmirī – both face a tragic ending, while Mūsā and his true followers ultimately live on to reap their rewards in this life and the next.

ĀYĀT 99-135

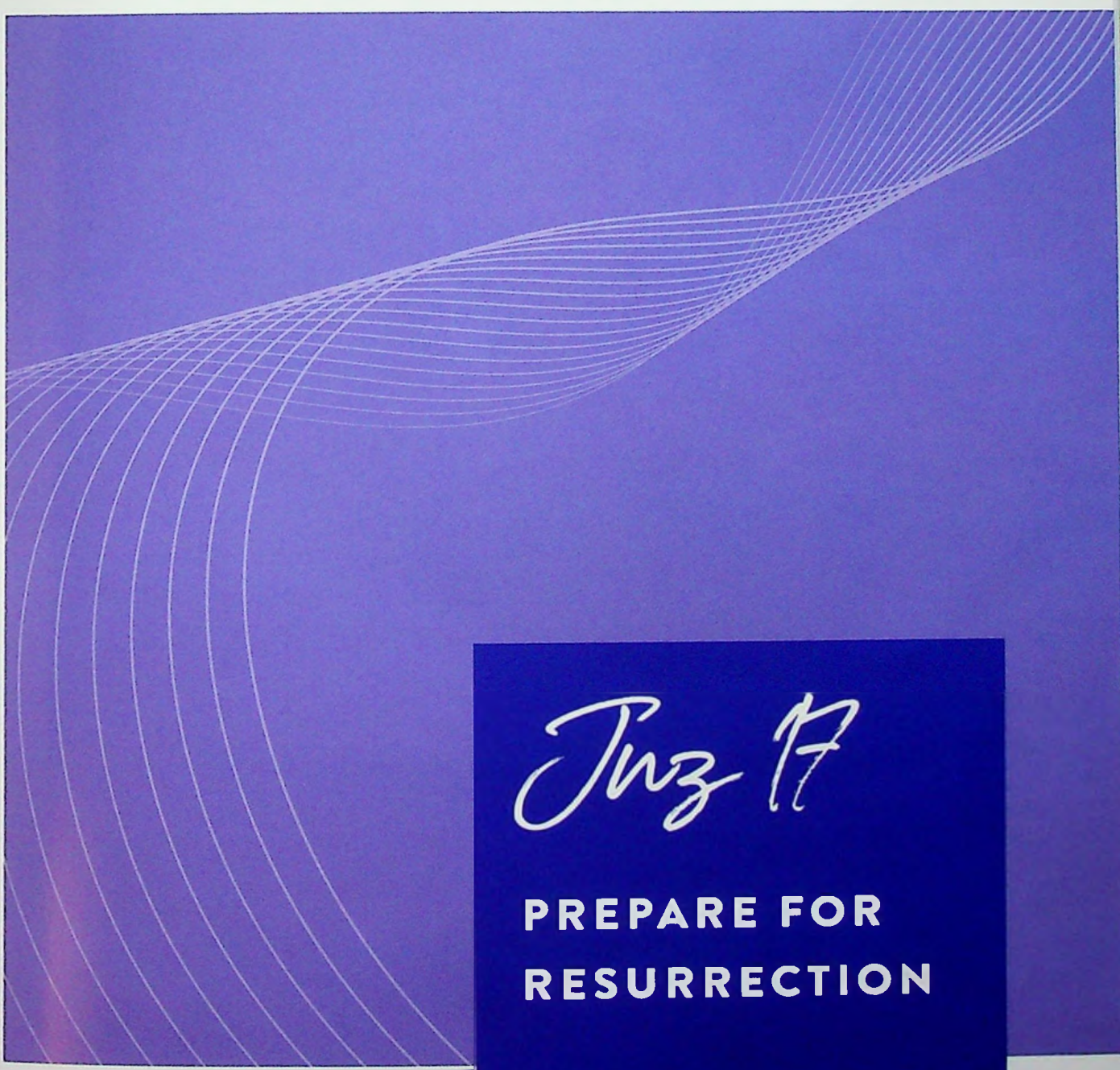
As we approach the end of the surah, Allah reintroduces the theme of the Day of Judgment, as He has done in several surahs that have preceded this one. One of the wisdoms behind this is that the disbelief of the Prophet's opponents was primarily motivated and driven by their denial of the Resurrection and Divine reckoning. In the case of the polytheists, they didn't believe in it at all, while the Jews and Christians had distorted the facts about its reality and fabricated details of its process.

Allah describes the total authority He will command on that Day. Human beings will no longer have control over their movements or their words, and it will become evident that they are entirely at the mercy of Allah's will.

Lastly, Allah directs us to the story of Ādam and Ḥawwā'. He reminds us that the strategy of materialism that Iblīs adopted to lead them to misguidance is the same strategy that he continues to use to deceive the generations after them. Allah wants for us to consciously and voluntarily reject that path, and so He gives us abundant signs to inspire us, and reveals stories of the people before us so that we can avoid repeating their mistakes. Yet, even when people insist on rejecting His guidance, He still gives them respite. By offering them this additional opportunity to reconsider, He leaves them with no excuse when the Day of Reckoning comes. He has given them a Messenger, a Book of clear guidance, and details of what to expect. So, if anyone wants to prepare for that Day and succeed, he should pray and submit, and anyone who ignores the approach of that Day will learn the lessons, in the same way the Pharaoh has, when they experience their own demise.

Human beings will no longer have control over their movements or their words, and it will become evident that they are entirely at the mercy of Allah's will.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Juz 17

PREPARE FOR RESURRECTION

SURAH AL-ANBIYĀ'

ĀYĀT 1-29

The end of the previous surah, *Ṭāhā,* flows directly into this one. In the last *āyah* of Surah *Ṭāhā,* Allah tells the Prophet to wait until Allah's Judgment arrives. Hence Surah *al-Anbiyā'* begins with a description of how close this Judgment really is, how serious it will be, and how all the Prophets preceding Prophet Muhammad ﷺ have warned humanity of it. The overarching themes of this surah relate to the fundamentals of the religion that will determine one's success, and what will lead to one's failure on that Day, namely those acts that classify as polytheism.

In the beginning of this surah, Allah chastises those who think that this matter is a game and take the Day of Judgment lightly. In order to emphasize its seriousness, Allah reminds them of how many Messengers He has sent to reiterate the same message. He uses many powerful words to describe how truth will obliterate falsehood through various logical arguments that appeal to common sense.

Faith communities of the past have a habit of finding obscure language from revelation to justify their own agenda of worshiping other gods. Here, Allah makes a point to use clear, unambiguous language to oppose this practice and reveal that the punishment for those people will be the Hellfire.

ĀYĀT 30-47

Now that Allah has used rational arguments to prove the truth, in this section He transitions to the practice of examining nature to arrive at the truth. Each time Allah directs us to nature, He highlights a different natural phenomenon that wasn't emphasized before,

thereby proving that this Qur'an is revealed by the One who has absolute knowledge of His creation. He details the inception of the universe and the purpose of the sky, the land, and the celestial bodies. If He created all of these things so masterfully, why would it be hard for Him to create the Resurrection? Moreover, why would a person think that all of this was created for no higher purpose?

On the contrary, He shows us that the life of this universe does have a purpose, and this is why Messengers are sent to remind humanity of their responsibility to fulfil their purpose. So those who take this life lightly, worship false deities, and mock the Messengers will undoubtedly be taken to task.

ĀYĀT 48-72

Having now established both the rational and natural proofs of His existence, Allah brings us back to the stories of the Prophets to highlight new details that further prove how humanity has reacted to this guidance in the past.

Living up to its title, this surah will mention most of the Prophets, but this time Prophet Ibrāhīm's story is given more attention than before. In Surah *Maryam*, his childhood was mentioned in passing, whereas in this surah we learn more details of the arguments he used against his people to prove Allah's existence.

Here we learn about the ways that he attempted to use rational arguments to convince them. And when that didn't work, Allah provided him the unique miracle of becoming entirely fireproof. Even then, they did not believe.

ĀYĀT 73-100

Here Allah reminds us about the lineages of the other Prophets, how they were all related, and how each of their people took their turns betraying them and opposing their message. Prophets Lūṭ,

Nūḥ, Mūsā, Hārūn, Sulaymān, Ayyūb, Yūnus, Ismāʿīl, Idrīs, Dhū al-Kifl, Zakariyyā, Yaḥyā, and ʿĪsā were all sent with overwhelming evidence of their Prophethood, just like Prophet Ibrāhīm. They displayed miracles and made extensive use of both rational and natural proofs to back up their claims to worship Allah. Yet, their preaching often fell on deaf ears as most of their people continued to spread their corruption. As a result, all of them were destroyed while the believers were saved.

It is through all of these stories that we learn the pattern through which Allah deals with disbelieving nations. He leaves us with no doubts concerning the consequences of belief and disbelief in this world, and it only makes sense to expect that these consequences reflect what will happen on the Day of Judgment.

ĀYĀT 101-112

One of the reasons why it is so important to regularly remember the Day of Judgment is because it protects the believers from the delusion that their opponents are being blessed in the form of enjoyments of this world. As we have learned in this surah and the ones preceding it, all of the disbelieving nations in history enjoyed the luxuries of this world, only to face disappointment when they see it come to an end and are left with nothing but ruins. And on the Day of Judgment, they will see those luxuries they worshipped previously transform into torments and act as a proof against them. On the other hand, the believers might suffer some temporary inconveniences and loss in this world, but the Day of Judgment will reveal that their sacrifices were investments that propelled them into everlasting enjoyment. With this mindset, believers can maintain the correct perspective with respect to the life of this world. It also helps them comprehend the unseen reality behind everything that happens in the struggle between people, belief, and disbelief, knowing that everything will be judged by its ending, not its beginning.

Allah leaves us with no doubts concerning the consequences of belief and disbelief in this world.

SURAH ḤAJJ

ĀYĀT 1-23

Since the end of Surah *al-Anbiyā'* puts forth signs of the Last Day, such as description of its arrival and the coming of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, here in Surah *Ḥajj*, Allah continues this theme by detailing the state of people on that Day. Moreover, this surah will not only continue delivering proofs of the Day of Judgment, but it will also give humanity the instructions on the best ways to prepare for that Day, namely by following the legacy of Ibrāhīm that has been championed by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

In the beginning of the surah, Allah gives us proofs of His ability to resurrect by showing us both how He brought us to life the first time as well as how He brings life to the earth.

Having presented these proofs, He then exposes how irrational and shallow disbelievers and hypocrites are in their scepticism of Allah's power. What makes their scepticism worse is that it makes no difference to the reality of Allah's authority. While they call upon their gods and avoid accepting guidance, all the rest of creation is in complete submission to Him, and this places disbelievers in disharmony with the entire universe. As a result, they will find that nothing will be in harmony with them in the Hereafter.

ĀYĀT 24-38

This section builds upon the previous showing that, not only have the disbelievers created disharmony between themselves and nature, but they also have created disharmony between them and the symbols of Allah, namely the rites of hajj. Here, Allah teaches us the legacy of Prophet Ibrāhīm and the universal religion he upheld that was meant to help save humanity from the punishments of the Day of Judgment.

One of the highlights of the legacy of Ibrāhīm is the fact that he magnified the sacred symbols of Allah. This practice ensures the believer remain humble, vigilant, and rooted in faith, seeking out opportunities to demonstrate their dedication to Allah. These symbols can be related to time, people, things, or places, and they are determined by Allah and not by us. Just as Iblīs did not have a say in whether or not Ādam should be the sacred symbol of Allah's command on earth, likewise human beings do not determine what Allah's sacred symbols are. Nevertheless, they are commanded to magnify them as a test of their humility and servitude to Allah. This principle extends to the sacrifice of animals as well because Allah has specified this as the preferred offering made to gain proximity to Him. One of the wisdoms of this concept is that the more one can respect the minor sacred symbols, the better prepared they will be to experience the major symbols, such as the Day of Judgment.

ĀYĀT
39-59

Unsurprisingly, the act of violating Allah's sacred symbols is a pattern among disbelievers. Examples of this include the killing of the oppressed and the destruction of the places of worship. Other examples can be found in the stories of nations who rejected Allah's revelation and the miracles He sent them through their Prophets. Once the symbols of Allah were dishonoured and the Prophets rejected, it was only a matter of time before Allah would destroy those nations.

Allah reminds us that this revelation, the Qur'an, is one of those sacred miracles that is established by Allah, regardless of the devils attempts to distort it. And for this nation, the Qur'an will be a test that will distinguish between those who are destined to earn Allah's reward and those who are destined for His punishment. Those who believe in and magnify the Qur'an will be rewarded, while those who attempt to violate this sacred Book and its message will be setting themselves up for ruin.

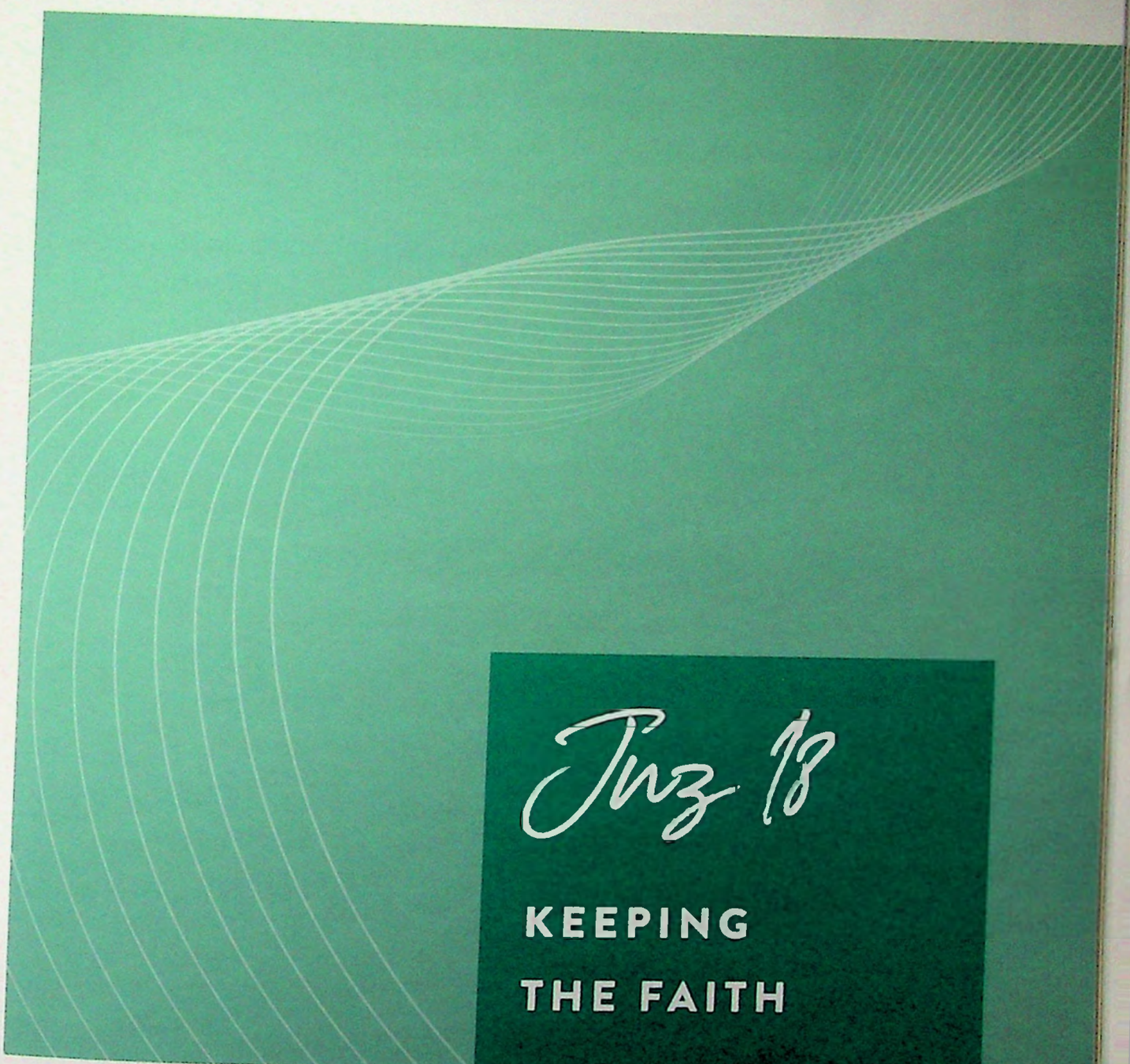
ĀYĀT
60-78

Believers do not have to wait for the Day of Judgment to witness justice, but rather Allah promises that His justice and protection will also extend to the believers in this world. To prove this, He reminds us of the pattern that He has set in creation: just as the day follows the night and barren earth is rejuvenated, likewise His victory will follow oppression.

Believers should not be deterred by concerns over their wellbeing when delivering guidance to those who have violated the sacred symbols of Allah. The believers must understand that whatever adversity they face in this world will be incomparable to the torment that awaits those who reject the Qur'an. Allah challenges the disbelievers to create something as small as a fly to show the power that He has over them. Such examples highlight the strength of the arguments presented in the Qur'an. This alone is enough reassurance that nothing can harm the believer if Allah is with them.

Therefore, in conclusion, Allah reminds us to continue to follow the way of Ibrāhīm, magnifying what Allah has deemed to be sacred, struggling to strive in the way of truth, and knowing that if we succeed in doing this, Allah will be our Protector, even during the terrifying scene on the Day of Judgment that was detailed in the very first *āyah*.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Juz 18

KEEPING THE FAITH

SURAH AL-MU'MINŪN

ĀYĀT 1-21

While Surah *Ḥajj* touched on the sacred symbols of Allah and the foundations that are needed for the believer to establish his relationship with Him, Surah *al-Mu'minūn* introduces us to the process through which believers are developed and the manifestation of their success in this life and the next.

Allah begins by detailing six specific attributes that define the successful believers. One of the lessons we learn when studying these attributes is that they cover a range of disciplines that relate to all of the major aspects of human life: the heart, tongue, wealth, intimacy, agreements, and time. Once a person's heart is filled with belief in Allah, this belief will penetrate the other facets of that person's life and define the nature of their relationship with the things that they are attached to.

Allah uses this section to remind us that the foundation of such a comprehensive belief is the believer's knowledge of Allah's comprehensive blessings, and His control over their affairs, from birth to death and everything in between. Hence, it is easy for one who recognizes Allah's overwhelming presence to maintain faith regardless of the changes in their external environment.

ĀYĀT 22-50

Once again, Allah utilizes the stories of the Prophets. This time to demonstrate the resilience of believers, and how He directed them towards success. Allah initiated this surah declaring the victory and success of the believers. These accounts provide proofs of this in history, and thus, Allah uses them to support His declaration.

Starting with a discussion of Prophet Nūḥ, Allah teaches us that once his people totally rejected him, he turned to Allah for victory. Allah gave him exactly what he needed to succeed in his mission to preserve the faith of the believing community while the disbelievers were destroyed.

Then we are brought to reflect on the people of Thamūd. Here we find that once their Prophet summoned the victory of Allah, Allah gave him the insight he needed to ensure his wellbeing during the community's destruction. The same story repeats itself with all of the Prophets who were rejected.

ĀYĀT 51-80

Having demonstrated the determination of the Prophets, Allah reminds the believers to remain steadfast and ensure that what they consume and produce is good by first rectifying the belief in their hearts. When people do this, they improve themselves as well as those around them through their submission to Allah. They fulfil their ultimate purpose as human beings, and Allah protects and aids them.

On the other hand, those who reject the guidance from Allah only bring harm to themselves and destroy the world around them, and this is why Allah destroys them.

ĀYĀT 81-118

In this section, Allah elaborates why the disbelievers are prone to destroying themselves on the Day of Judgment. He instructs the Prophet ﷺ to ask them basic questions regarding the Originator of the heavens and the earth. We find that they have no response other than to refer back to Allah Himself. Yet they still deny the possibility of Allah recreating the universe on the Day of Judgment and refuse to prepare for it before their death.

Allah follows this up with descriptions of the reality of the Day of Judgment and the punishments for the disbelievers. On that day, they will be filled with regret for not being among the believers, who were ultimately successful.

SURAH NŪR

ĀYĀT 1-20

Through the previous surah, Allah established the success of the believers by showing us how He extends His aid. He continues on the same theme by revealing a surah that guides the believers through their tribulations, giving them the principles they need to live a righteous lifestyle that determines their success not only in the next world, but in this world as well.

In the beginning of Surah *al-Mu'minūn,* Allah went into more detail on matters of intimacy for the believers. We find that He expounds on that attribute by discussing how believers should preserve the sanctity of their bodies and their reputation.

In this section, Allah describes the laws of slander, fornication, adultery, and the standards of evidence needed to prove a claim. He also outlines the measures to protect those who are innocent from being wrongly accused. This subject is in line with the false accusations made against the Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah and vindicates her from allegations of wrongdoing and sin.

We also learn that these false accusations of sexual misconduct are so egregious that Allah would have normally punished the accusers Himself had they not been from among the nation of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

ĀYĀT 27-33

At this point, Allah teaches the believers how they can increase their illumination and avoid following the paths of the devil that lead to sin. First, He teaches us to avoid bringing financial harm to those who are in need simply due to our own ill feelings against them, even when those feelings are justified. We should also avoid harming the innocent with unsubstantiated accusations and strive to protect our dignity and the dignity of others by respecting the privacy of people's homes. Allah has made the homes of believers incubators of His light, and therefore, the spiritual integrity of their homes must be protected. Hence, Allah gives us various *āyāt* on the topic of protecting the homes throughout this surah.

This effort to protect one's heart even extends to lowering one's gaze in the presence of members of the opposite gender who are not related. The purpose of this is to limit the pathways through which the devil could enter into our hearts and minds with evil thoughts that would extinguish the light in our souls. Allah gives us additional means through which we can protect our dignity, encouraging us to marry or remain chaste until the opportunity of marriage presents itself.

ĀYĀT 34-46

In this section, Allah teaches us why these practices are important by describing the unique gift of light that He bestows on those who preserve their hearts for Him. The devil has made a mission of stripping humanity of the Divine light that they were created to behold. He lures mankind into following sinful paths to diminish the light of the soul. On the other hand, Allah gives us an elaborate analogy of what this light is and where it resides. He also juxtaposes this light with the darkness and illusions associated with disbelief.

To explain just how comprehensive His mercy is, Allah presents examples of the birds in the sky, the rain clouds He develops to irrigate land, and how that same water sustains all living beings.

Similarly, Allah's light and guidance sustains believers and illuminates them with spiritual life just as water enables physical life. Hence, when people reject this guidance, refusing to allow it to define their lives, they are inflicting illness on their own selves and killing their own spirit.

ĀYĀT 53-60

Having described the nature of light and darkness as well as the ways in which believers can protect themselves from diminishing their light, Allah now directs us to pay attention to how light and darkness manifest themselves in people's words and actions. Those who have darkness in their hearts will be disobedient and try to compensate for that with excuses and emphatic words. On the other hand, the actions of those who possess light reflect what is made clear in the guidance. Since they put in the effort to improve their hearts for the sake of Allah, He will also improve their external circumstances.

These expressions of light and dignity that Allah has described are not limited to people who are engaging in sexual relations, rather they extend to the wider society. As we approach the end of the surah, Allah teaches us how even the elderly and children can do their part to preserve the dignity of the human being. He provides specific instructions on how they are expected to conduct themselves around the rest of the community.

ĀYĀT 61-64

Allah ends the surah by regulating the types of homes that allow for different interactions and in which people are free to roam without fear of violating the light of dignity that Allah has placed in them.

On the other hand, Allah Himself adopts the responsibility of regulating the believers' behaviour and conduct in a way that protects the Prophet's status in the eyes of the people – a topic relating to the early part of the surah. The believers' success and victory rests on

their respect for the Prophet and their efforts to protect his dignity. Just as Allah protects the homes of the believers from being violated through His laws, He also takes responsibility to protect the Prophet's status among the people. If we live up to the profound guidance in this surah, we will receive the light from Allah from within and gain success through His victory that He promises for those who embrace His light.

SURAH AL-FURQĀN

ĀYĀT
1-20

Surah *al-Mu'minūn* described the victory and success of the Prophet and his followers in the Hereafter. And in the subsequent surahs, Allah established the internal and external manifestation of that victory. For the inward victory, Surah *al-Nūr* describes the vindication of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from accusations made internally and extends guidance for his followers to protect themselves from similar claims. As for the outward victory, Surah *al-Furqān* vindicates the Prophet from the external arguments that disbelievers made against the validity of his Prophethood and message, giving clear evidence of the truth.

Allah begins with a list of arguments the disbelievers made against the humanity of the Prophet, the validity of the Qur'an, and the miracles he came with, implying that he was not qualified to be a Prophet, nor had he given them sufficient proof that would convince them to believe in him.

Since Allah is aware of the arrogance they harbour in their hearts, He reminds them that neither their arguments nor their false gods will save them from the torments of Hell, and then proceeds to show them how the Prophet ﷺ is no different than the Prophets who came before him. He concludes the surah with a mention of the believers and how they will benefit from the enjoyments of the next world for fulfilling the rights of this message and the Messenger.

“Those who reject the guidance from Allah only bring harm to themselves and destroy the world around them, and this is why Allah destroys them.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Juz 19

THE GRAVITY OF TRUTH

ĀYĀT 21-44

Building on the themes of Surah *al-Furqān,* Allah continues to teach us the arguments used by the disbelievers and what their destiny will be if they persist in their arrogance. He reminds us that, regardless of all the objections and demands they throw at the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, none of their schemes will help them in the Hereafter since Allah has given them all the proof they need to believe in this message. Accepting this message is the only thing that will save them from the torment of the Day of Judgment.

Allah reminds us of the examples of previous Prophets who came with the same core message. Their people refused to believe in them and rejected the proofs that were provided, but none of their arguments held any significance when the punishment from Allah descended upon them. The people of Mūsā were destroyed, the people of Nūḥ were destroyed, and so were all the other communities that are well-known and have been detailed in previous surahs. Allah mentions this as if to say, "What makes you disbelievers think that you are safe from the same punishment?" The reality is that they are completely blinded by their arrogance and would rather worship their desires than Allah, even if they know that it will inevitably destroy them.

ĀYĀT 45-77

In this section Allah demonstrates various proofs that reaffirm the validity of the Qur'an, showing that He has created the Earth with all the elements that human beings need to recognise His existence and worship Him. All people have to do is look around them and appreciate the perfection of the sky, the cycles of the day and night,

the way He distributes water throughout the world, and the way He divides the seas.

A person using his or her intellect would not need to look much further to realize the power of Allah and His ability to create the Hereafter and the Day of Judgment. These signs also reveal how the nature around us was created with such precision for a great purpose. Reflecting on simple blessings we take for granted, such as water, is enough proof to sense the power of Allah.

Anyone who sees the layers of intricacy in the nature that surrounds them, actively benefits from it knowing full well that they had no control over it to begin with, and then utterly rejects the One who has proven to be the Master and Creator of it all, simply cannot be reasoned with.

On the other hand, Allah describes the people who are in harmony with Allah's guidance and have embraced their responsibility in this world. They are conscious of their relationship with nature, worship, sincerity, wealth, life, repentance, honesty, and family values. These are the type of people who Allah shows His favour to. And these are the type of attributes that will lead a person to success.

SURAH AL-SHU'ARĀ'

ĀYĀT 1-33

In the last āyah of Surah *al-Furqān,* Allah promises disbelievers a severe punishment as a consequence of their rejection of the clear evidence proving the validity of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

This is a difficult realization for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who understands the gravity of this promise and feels obligated to do whatever he can to save his people by guiding them to the truth. Allah consoles him in this surah by reminding him that he is not

“All people have to do is look around them and appreciate the perfection of the sky, the cycles of the day and night, the way Allah distributes water throughout the world, and the way He divides the seas.

to blame for the punishment of disbelievers nor can he make his people accept a message that they choose to disregard. However, Allah demonstrates that the Prophet's reaction is not unexpected by drawing parallels to the stories of previous Prophets. These stories, once again, highlight that his situation is not unique, and that the pattern of disbelief can be observed throughout history. Allah proves this by reintroducing the greatest example of disbelief: the Pharaoh.

In the story of Mūsā, we find that he was concerned about his message being rejected by the Pharaoh. In this particular account, Allah reveals new details surrounding the debate between Mūsā and the Pharaoh. And sure enough, we find that the Pharaoh was not at all interested in reason, nor was he moved by all of the obvious miracles Prophet Mūsā received from Allah.

ĀYĀT
34-68

In this section we see how the Pharaoh persists in his denial by arranging a challenge between his sorcerers and Mūsā. In an unexpected turn of events, at the end of this contest, we find that the sorcerers are convinced while the Pharaoh still refuses to submit. In fact, he went so far into his disbelief that he crucified the sorcerers for their acknowledgment of the truth. This surah provides additional details about the sorcerers to show that His miracles are truly sufficient proof for people who are sincere. In contrast, the disbeliever's denial is not related to the presentation of the Messenger or the details of the message, but rather it is simply a blind arrogance in the disbeliever's heart, as was the case with the Pharaoh.

Allah shows the Prophet how the disbelievers' ruin is purely as a consequence of their own actions, and that there is nothing that the Messenger can do to save them if they have made up their minds.

At the end of Mūsā's story, Allah gives us new details about how the Pharaoh decided to chase Mūsā out of Egypt. He ignored the miracle of the splitting of the sea and continued to pursue Prophet Mūsā into the ocean. And, once again, there was nothing that Prophet Mūsā could do to prevent that outcome.

ĀYĀT
69-191

Next we are presented with the story of Ibrāhīm and his sincere concern for his people. Allah shows us that no matter how many rational arguments Prophet Ibrāhīm made use of to prove monotheism, it made no difference to them. Even his family did not believe him. And this is the same challenge that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ faced when preaching to his own relatives. Even though the Prophet warns them of the torments of Hell, going into great detail, it makes no difference to them how true and eloquent his message is; none of that will move a person's heart if they persist in their arrogance and refuse to submit to the truth.

Next, we return to the stories of Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lūṭ, and Shu'ayb. Each of these stories followed the same pattern: the Prophets came to their people to remind them to worship Allah alone and warn them about the most egregious sins in their culture but their people rejected them, citing irrational excuses. These excuses include, but are not limited to, how the message only appealed to the poor, that the Prophet was insane, that the Prophet had a hidden agenda, or that these were folk tales. None of these nations addressed the merits of the message itself.

Then their Prophet would produce a miracle, and each one of these miracles was tailored to convince the nation based on their specific worldly attachments. In response, each nation would declare their Prophet a magician instead of accepting that the miracle came from Allah, or they would claim that their Prophet was bringing bad omens with him.

When the miracles would not convince them, they would threaten their Prophets with death or banishment and escalate their disbelief to the point where they challenge the Prophet to bring the punishment of Allah.

Once the Prophet could not remain in their city any longer, Allah would command him to leave with his followers while He destroyed the nation they left behind. Each punishment was tailored specifically to the crimes that were committed. In these stories is a lesson for anyone who wants to know the cycle of the human struggle between truth and falsehood.

ĀYĀT 192-227

As Surah *al-Shuʿarā'* comes to a close, Allah leads the subject back to the Prophet and the Qur'an. As with the previous Prophets, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is from the nation he was sent to preach to, and the language of the Qur'an is in the language of his nation; clear Arabic for the Arabs to understand. Even some elite scholars from the Children of Israel have affirmed the truth of his Prophethood and converted to follow him during his time. After all of this evidence is presented, there is no other proof left to convince them other than the punishment of Allah. But once that comes, it will be too late to believe, just as it was for the previous nations. In reality, the falsehood is that which is being advocated by the disbelievers, so Allah instructs the Prophet to remain steadfast because the truth will always prevail.

SURAH AL-NAML

ĀYĀT 1-44

In Surah *al-Shuʿarā',* Allah started the surah by consoling the Prophet, advising him not to be heartbroken by the rejection he faced at the hands of his people. This consolation is completed at the conclusion of the surah where Allah reveals that He will turn

the tables against the disbelievers and let the believers taste victory after their oppression. In other words, there is Divine wisdom embedded in this mission of belief that will bring about benefits that we don't perceive. Following on from this, in Surah *al-Naml,* Allah expounds upon how His Divine wisdom manifests.

He begins by returning to the story of Mūsā, citing how all the miracles he presented did nothing to please the Pharaoh. However, Mūsā's legacy did bring about an entire lineage of Prophets after him such as Dāwūd and Sulaymān.

It is here that we learn how Allah destroyed the kingdom of the Pharaoh while laying the foundations for one of the greatest kingdoms in human history: the kingdom of Prophet Sulaymān. Unlike the Pharaoh, who killed children and slaughtered the innocent, Prophet Sulaymān brought order, justice, and peace not only for human beings but also for the jinn. Among his admirable characteristics was his humility which enabled him to take knowledge from the birds and even the ants.

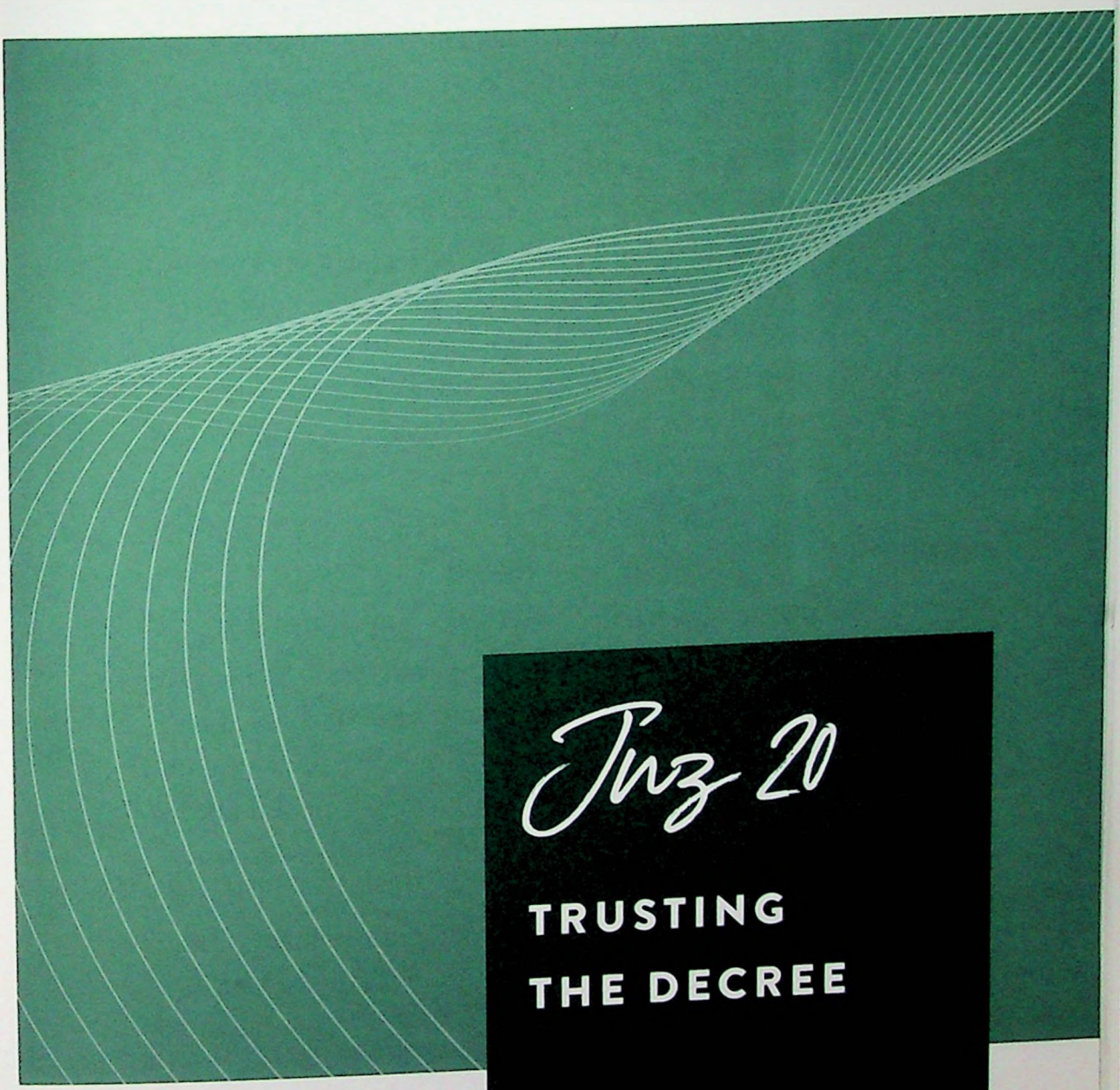
Allah uses the story of Prophet Sulaymān to display the wisdom of Divine guidance when it is applied correctly. Through the story of the jinn and the man, we learn that there is no physical power that can match the power of a man supported by Divine guidance; both claimed that they could move things supernaturally, but the man with knowledge of Divine guidance was far superior in his abilities than the jinn.

We also see the contrast between leaders blessed with Divine guidance, and those deprived of it. In the beginning of the surah, we are reminded of the Pharaoh, who proudly denied every sign until the moment he died. On the other hand, we learn that when guidance is presented to the sincere, it will influence them to submit to Allah regardless of their power and position, as was the case with Bilqīs.

The falsehood is that which is being advocated by the disbelievers, so Allah instructs the Prophet to remain steadfast because the truth will always prevail.

Similarly, we are reminded of the people of Thamūd who were destined to become a sign for the believers after them. Allah preserved their homes as proof of His power and revelation, just as He preserved the body of the Pharaoh for humanity to reflect upon the consequences of disbelief. Likewise, the people of Lūṭ are well-known throughout history, and they were made an example of due to the gravity of the sin they introduced. Their story continues to inspire fear in Allah's punishment for people who persist in abominable behaviour. In each story, Allah demonstrates how He changes the apparent balance of power and establishes the supremacy of His guidance in unexpected ways that can only unfold through Divine wisdom.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



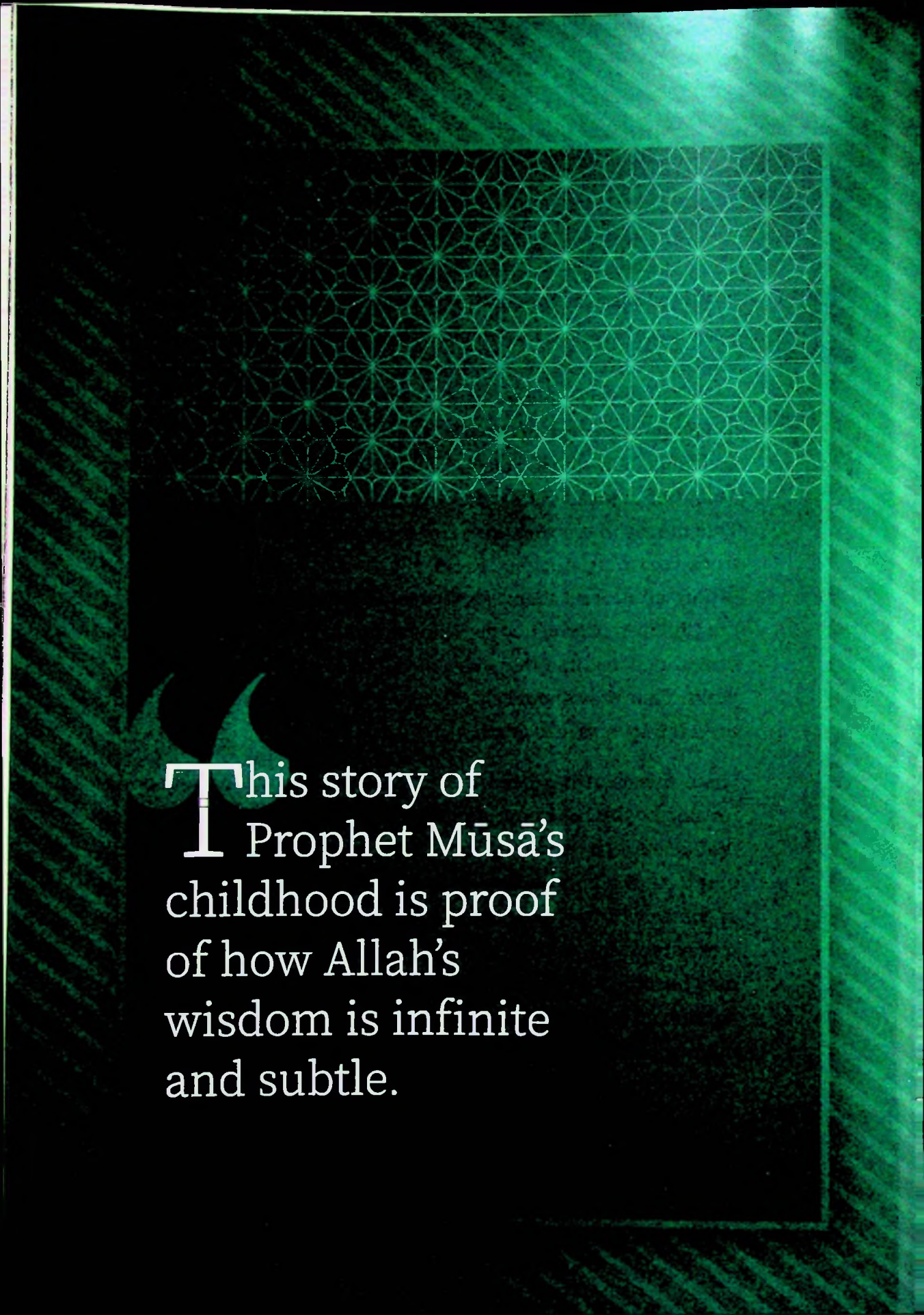
Juz 20

TRUSTING THE DECREE

ĀYĀT
59-93

In this section, as the surah arrives at its conclusion, Allah emphasizes to the Prophet how explicit the truth has been made through the Qur'an, leaving no one, pagan or other, any excuse to reject its signs. He starts by addressing the idolaters, comparing the evidence of His power presented in the Qur'an against the opposing arguments made by the idolaters. He does this by showing us that every aspect of nature verifies that it is Allah who brings life and death. This means that if they were sincere in their desire to discover the truth regarding Allah's abilities, they would find the fundamental proofs all around them. Moreover, Allah addresses the doubts of the Children of Israel by declaring that the Qur'an solves major historical debates that they have been arguing over for hundreds of years. Thus they should also recognise that this Qur'an is the truth, even if they refuse to admit it.

Since the truth has been well-established, and we have been informed of the behaviour and deeds that are expected from us, all that is left is to heed the message and prepare for the Day of Judgment. At this point, Allah gives us detailed descriptions and signs of the Day of Judgment for two significant reasons. Firstly, so that it may motivate us to prepare for that Day, and secondly, so that we may become familiar with its signs and take them as a source of reflection and wisdom. This topic of knowledge and wisdom relates to the beginning of the surah and will continue on into the next surah, *al-Qaṣaṣ*.


This story of Prophet Mūsā's childhood is proof of how Allah's wisdom is infinite and subtle.

SURAH AL-QAṢAṢ

ĀYĀT 1-13

Now that the previous surah has established the absolute wisdom and knowledge of Allah by revealing the nuances of the past and the signs of the Last Day, Allah gives us a surah that calls us to humbly submit to and trust in His decree. It encourages believers to have confidence that Allah will guide us to the best outcome, no matter how daunting our path may seem to be.

One of the greatest stories that demonstrate this is the story of Mūsā. Once again, Allah gives us new details about his childhood that shed light on just how encompassing Allah's wisdom was from the very beginning of Mūsā's life. Allah introduces the theme of this story from the very beginning of the surah: to empower the oppressed and torment the oppressor. From there we see how, at times, Allah put Prophet Mūsā in situations that appeared to put him in danger on the surface level, but in reality prepared him for his inevitable victory, as we will read later on in the surah.

This Divine strategy is revealed throughout the story as we see how Allah inspires Mūsā's mother to place her baby in the river, and how He guides the water to carry the baby safely to the Pharaoh's house. How He softens the heart of the Pharaoh to adopt Mūsā, inhibits the ability of the wet-nurses to feed him, brings Mūsā's sister into the palace at just the right time and place, and through all of this enables Mūsā to return to his mother.

This story of Prophet Mūsā's childhood is proof of how Allah's wisdom is infinite and subtle, and how every person is guided to serve His decree that brings about justice, whether they know it or not. Even the elements, such as water and milk, move or cease according to this wisdom.

ĀYĀT
14-42

Here we are exposed to the intricacies of Divine wisdom. As we see in this section, Prophet Mūsā grows up and repeatedly finds himself in situations where, no matter how he behaves, he is still forced to become a fugitive. In this account, he found himself in danger once again, just as he was at birth. Moreover, he was forced to wander aimlessly for some time until Allah brought him to a safe haven in Midian. This incident also draws parallels with the early stages of his life where he was aimlessly floating in the river until Allah delivered him to safety under the protection of Lady Āsiyah. Furthermore, he arrived at a family he could call his own, in similar manner to when Allah returned him to his family in his childhood. None of this could have been planned or foreseen by other than Allah.

At this point, it should not be a surprise to us that Allah is able to protect Prophet Mūsā when he is tasked to confront the Pharaoh. If Allah protected Mūsā from the Pharaoh as an infant during a time when he was killing infants, it is just as easy for Allah to protect him from the Pharaoh as a grown man bestowed with miracles from Him. With all of this in mind, it is easier for Prophet Mūsā to see how the promise of Allah transforms into reality, even if he is unable to ascertain precisely *how* it will happen.

As we approach the end of the story, we see how Mūsā, yet again, experiences a dangerous situation, and once again flees for his safety. Finally, he is saved from the Pharaoh in a similar way that he was miraculously saved the first two times in his life.

ĀYĀT
43-75

Now that Allah has demonstrated His wisdom extensively through the story of Prophet Mūsā, He brings our attention back to the current disbelievers, citing how their arguments against the Qur'an are just as baseless as the past arguments against the Torah. In the end, they are not following reason or nature, but rather their lowly

desires, and so long as they persist in oppressing themselves, Allah will not guide them.

Allah reveals to us the signs of people who disbelieve out of arrogance as well as the signs of those who are sincerely looking for guidance, so that we may be able to differentiate between them. Those who are sincerely in search for the truth will, in due course, find it in the Qur'an and will be graciously rewarded for following it. In contrast, those who make excuses to reject it will be exposed as frauds on the Day of Judgment; when Allah brings forth the gods they worshiped to answer for their disbelief. On that day, they will find that none of their excuses will save them from the punishment that has been prepared for them. It was clear from the very beginning that they always knew who really controlled the heavens and the earth. Allah was only allowing them to lie to themselves and reject guidance in this life to give them sufficient time to make up their minds, thereby leaving them with no argument against Him in the next life.

In the following section, Allah gives us a prime example of how this reality unfolds through the story of Qārūn.

ĀYĀT
76-88

Qārūn was a person to whom Allah bestowed an abundance of wealth, as a test for him and the people around him. As a result of this wealth, Qārūn became complacent and began giving himself credit for his riches instead of giving the credit to Allah. He assumed that his wealth could protect him from Allah's punishment. So instead of increasing in gratitude and humility towards Him, he increased in arrogance and disbelief.

On top of this, his mindset began to influence the people of weak faith around him, and they became impressed not just by his wealth, but with Qārūn himself. They took him as a model of success and tried to imitate him, ignoring all the signs of Allah's total control and authority over him.

As a result, Allah punished him, and made an example of him by causing the earth to swallow him and his wealth. What is noteworthy about this story is that Qārūn always knew that Allah had full control over the earth he stood upon, yet he simply refused to humble himself and acknowledge that reality. In other words, he wilfully chose to ignore Allah's power and hoped that Allah would continue to extend his blessings anyway. Similarly, Allah provides sustenance to the disbelievers, but they also wilfully ignore their Creator's control over them and find baseless ways to justify their disbelief. Allah will certainly take them to account for their deeds, and, through His Divine wisdom, every person will learn that they were granted all the opportunities to prepare for that Day.

SURAH AL-ʿANKABŪT

ĀYĀT
1-13

In the previous surah, Allah gives us insight into the wisdom of His decree, the subtleties of His protection and empowerment of the believers, and the gradual downfall of the disbelievers. In Surah *al-ʿAnkabūt,* Allah builds on this theme by giving us an understanding of the strength and resilience that comes with belief as well as the inherent shallowness and weakness built into disbelief.

From the beginning of the surah, Allah teaches us that He will put people of faith through various tests to strengthen them. As for the disbelievers, they should expect nothing but defeat in the long run. In the face of a trial, people who harbour disbelief will use that opportunity to blame Allah and abandon guidance, while the believers will be strengthened so they are able to stand firm and remain steadfast on their faith. Later, Allah will give us examples that demonstrate what this looks like.

ĀYĀT
14-45

Once again, we return to the stories of the Prophets to see how they and their people endured the trials Allah put them through. Starting with Prophet Nūḥ, Allah relates how he remained steadfast for 950 years while preaching to a nation that was deep in denial. The Prophet did not give up, but they refused to obey him and were eventually ruined.

Then we encounter Prophet Ibrāhīm and get a taste of the extensive evidence he presented to prove Allah's authority to his people. Nevertheless, despite almost an entire page's worth of deep theological proofs referencing nature, history, science, the Hereafter, and even common sense, his people responded with nothing but violence. The only one to follow him was Lūṭ.

The topic then flows into a discussion on the resilience of Prophet Lūṭ and how, through his *duʿā'*, the angels simultaneously brought good news to Ibrāhīm and torment to the people of Lūṭ.

Similarly, we are shown the resilience of Prophet Shuʿayb and the destruction of Midian as well as the destruction of ʿĀd, Thamūd, Qārūn, Hāmān, and the Pharaoh.

All of these stories prove that the believers will always be in a position of strength even if it appears to be otherwise, and the only harm that can afflict them is from the tests Allah sends to strengthen them. Meanwhile, the disbelievers have no protection from Allah, and their foolish attempts to shield themselves from Allah's reckoning are just as futile as the protection provided by a spider's web.

In the end, the believers have the most important resources they need in order to be resilient and repel evil: prayer, *dhikr,* and the Qur'an.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imam Hamzah Abdul-Malik is a Hafiz of Qur'an who holds a bachelors in Islamic Law and a masters in Islamic Leadership. He traveled the world to study with traditional scholars and has over 15 years of formal traditional Islamic education from Jami' Imam an-Nafi' in Morocco, Abu Noor in Damascus, Dar al-Mustapha in Tarim, and al-Azhar University. In 2012, he returned home to the states to raise his family and invest his knowledge and training into community building and Islamic education. He founded Midtown Mosque and Miraaj Academy and hopes to bring all of his experiences and skills together to serve the Muslim community.